

yours for the weekend

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/35573731) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/35573731>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Video Blogging RPF , Minecraft (Video Game)
Relationship:	Clay Dream/GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF)
Character:	Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream's Family (Video Blogging RPF)
Additional Tags:	Strangers to Lovers , Fake/Pretend Relationship , Alternate Universe - College/University , Christmas , Mutual Pining , Practice Kissing , Oblivious Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream is So Whipped (Video Blogging RPF) , Hurt/Comfort , Fluff and Angst , Implied/Referenced Homophobia , Religion , Explicit Sexual Content , Smut , First Time , Love Confessions , Mistletoe
Language:	English
Collections:	dnf 2021 secret santa
Stats:	Published: 2021-12-08 Completed: 2021-12-20 Chapters: 4/4 Words: 26795

yours for the weekend

by [flickerfonds](#)

Summary

He sighs. *It's now or never.* "I'm supposed to bring my boyfriend home with me for Christmas."

"But you just said you don't have a boyfriend?"

And therein lies the issue. George realizes it the second the words fall from his lips, realization flashing across his features like he's been caught in the stage lights too. "Oh."

Dream messed up. Like, *really* messed up. Like, off-the-charts-horrible-disaster-category-five-hurricane messed up. He needs a Christmas miracle to save his ass. Well, that or a kind stranger with a twinkle in his eye who just can't stop smiling.

Notes

hi merry christmas! this fic is gifted to the lovely honk as part of my secret santa exchange this year!

i'm currently planning on three chapters + an epilogue, expect an update soon!

make sure to read the tags, and enjoy <3

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

open road

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream's ex is the *worst*. There's no other way to put it.

He broke up with her the summer before going off to college, like most people would. It shouldn't have been that big of a deal, really. Everything was a big deal when it came to her, though, so it was. It's not that she treated him badly or anything of the like, he's just sick of being reminded of her constantly.

Of course, she has to post her new boyfriend all over every social media imaginable. Obnoxious is the best way to describe how she makes it her mission to ensure Dream knows she's happy without him.

He's looking at her newest Instagram post when his phone rings.

It's his mom, according to the name flashing across the screen. Dream picks up, despite the fact that he has his last exam in about twenty minutes. It's not like it's anything crazy difficult, just freshman level statistics.

"Did you see?"

It's the first time they've spoken in weeks, funnily enough. He knows what she's asking about without her ever having to say. Dream still has the courtesy to ask, though.

"See what, Mom?"

She scoffs, like it should be the most obvious thing in the world. It is, in a way, when you've lived in the same middle-of-nowhere town for your entire life. "Natalie and John are dating."

He's sick of it. Sick of the constant texts, all the DMs asking how he is and if he's seen her newest story (he has, by the way), and the never-ending stream of people assuming he cares about drama that's six months and nearly a thousand miles behind him. He doesn't even want to think about what it'll be like when he comes into town for Christmas. He didn't skip Thanksgiving without due cause.

"Okay," he says. Dream doesn't care about her in the slightest. He cares that people *expect* him to care when it's the last thing he wants to do. There's a reason he went so far away for school, and the fact that people still treat him like the same boy they've known since he was six is ridiculous. "Why are you telling me this again? I'm about to take an exam."

It's probably a rude thing to ask his mother. He's frustrated enough to warrant it, in his mind. He just wants to be left alone, more than anything else.

"Well— I just thought you'd want to know, 's all," she stutters out. He can almost bring himself to feel bad.

Almost.

"Why the hell would I care about what the girl I dated in high school is doing?" he spits. "She's in Florida, and I'm here. I haven't even seen her since July, actually."

He might have tried to move on already, but it's clear his mother hasn't.

"Well, I remembered you took it pretty hard when the two of you broke up. I wasn't sure if you were over her yet."

And then, Dream has the worst idea he's ever had.

"Mom, I literally have a boyfriend. Of course I'm over her," he says. He knows lying is wrong, but he can't bring himself to any other solution. Evidently, it was not a very good one.

She is silent on the other end of the line. Dream knows she's never been the most understanding of his sexuality — his junior year proved that — but his mother isn't a mean spirited person. She just wants the best for him, and sometimes their ideas of *best* don't quite line up. It's more from shock than anything, Dream thinks. He hasn't spoken a single word of romance to her all semester, and suddenly he's claiming something that is not a small commitment.

Still, she is his mother before all else. "Oh, really honey?" she asks excitedly. "I'm so happy for you."

Dream can't help but feel like a bit of an asshole. The closest thing he's had to a boyfriend was the closeted sophomore who begged him to keep their singular kiss a secret so his fraternity wouldn't find out. He did — of course — but Dream hasn't spoken to him in over a month. He's in deep shit, to say the least.

"Mhm, I'm really happy," he says through gritted teeth.

And then, because somehow she's read his mind already, his mom asks the one thing Dream thinks he can answer. "Why didn't you tell me sooner? I want to be involved in your life."

"We've been busy figuring out Christmas plans, because he can't go home right now. And, well, you haven't really had the..." Dream trails off. He wants to be honest, but there is a fine line between telling the truth and whatever situation he's found himself in. "You seem to like it more when I date girls, is all. I didn't want to disappoint you."

It's the perfect excuse. It's honest, his mother can't deny that, but it's just detached enough that he can say it without feeling like he's some kind of monster.

"Oh, I never wanted to make you feel like that," she says. She is guilty enough to stop asking questions, or so Dream hopes. She won't apologize to him, though. He can live with that.

Dream glances over to the clock on the wall. He only has fifteen minutes now, the perfect excuse to leave and never talk about it again. He can pull some sob story about cheating over Christmas out of his ass in a week or two, and he'll never have to worry about this again. In a few years time it'll be nothing more than a funny story to tell over the dinner table, and all will be well.

"I'm sorry Mom, I have an exam soon. I need to go," Dream says. He wants this conversation to end more than anything.

"Okay honey, but one last thing before you hang up," she says. Dream sighs, but indulges her to continue. "Will you bring your boyfriend home for the holidays? You said he doesn't have anywhere else to go, and we would love to have him."

He's *fucked*.

It isn't a question or a polite request, despite the way it's phrased. She needs to meet Dream's new

boyfriend. She needs to approve.

He doesn't even exist.

"I'll ask him, but no promises," Dream says. He hopes it's good enough.

It's not. "Let him know we won't take no for an answer," his mother says. "See you two boys in a few days!"

The end of the line goes silent. She hangs up.

Dream needs to find a boyfriend to take home to his family in less than 24 hours. He's so much more than fucked.

And he's going to be late to his exam if he doesn't leave now.

Fuck.

He probably looks ridiculous running through his dorm lobby. Of all his professors, this one is by far the most strict about showing up on time. If he's more than a second past the posted start time, Dream knows he'll be damned to sitting outside a locked door and hoping his grade can take the hit.

Dream makes the mistake of glancing down at his phone. He's halfway through reading his roommate's good luck text when they collide.

As if today couldn't get any worse.

"Oh, shit," Dream grimaces while rubbing his shoulder. At the same time, he looks down to see a vaguely familiar face shaking out his arm. "I'm sorry, I'm about to be late for an exam."

He glances up to look at the man who's just caused what's sure to be a painful bruise in a day or two. "Me too, it's alright," he says in an accented voice. He's British, most likely. Interesting. If only he had time to linger on it.

"Sorry again, but I really need to go," Dream says. "My stats professor is the worst about people being late."

As he turns to leave, one hand already pushing open the metal door, a voice calls him back. "Dream, is it?"

Maybe he does have the time. Dream glances over his shoulder to see the Brit walking towards him. "I'm George. I think I'm in your statistics class," he says, and the tones sound familiar in his mind. If Dream actually showed up to class for more than the assessments, he probably could have placed George sooner.

"I thought you looked familiar," Dream admits. "Wanna run to class together, then? The professor doesn't like me already, so I kind of can't be late to this exam."

George just giggles. What about the situation is so funny to him, Dream has no clue.

"I did some research for him earlier in the semester, so he loves me," he says. "He's the one letting me stay on campus over break, so I'm sure we can be five minutes late to an exam."

"You're staying on campus?" Dream questions. He probably sounds a bit rude asking like he did, but his mind is already racing with possibilities. "Why?"

Again, he giggles. Dream didn't think he was that funny, but apparently George does. "I'm British, obviously."

Dream nods, shivering. He's not used to the cold and he can't say that he likes it very much. "So what, you don't feel like flying home for a few days?" he asks.

He probably shouldn't have. George falls quiet, eyes dropping to the ground beneath his feet. His voice isn't as happy as it was before.

"No, not that. I don't really get along with my family very well," he says. "I'm not too sure they would want me to come home right now. They're not the biggest fans of my *lifestyle*." The sarcasm practically drips from his voice. Dream understands the resentment well enough. It's something he's felt time and time again.

"Yeah, I get it. I've got some family like that too," Dream says before changing the subject. He can tell it's still a sore point for George, so he doesn't push it any further. "At least it's not as cold over here, though. I can't stand the winter."

George is shocked at that. "Are you serious?" he asks, like it's the most absurd thing he's ever heard. "I love the winter. Christmas is the fucking best."

Dream allows himself to chuckle. "I'm from Florida, so anything below sixty degrees is too cold for me. I can agree about Christmas though, I'm so pumped."

Before he responds to Dream, George pulls open the door to the math building. They both welcome the heating, with neither dressed properly for the winter weather. Once they are both inside and the door is firmly shut behind them, George turns back to face Dream. "Is it nice down there? The last time I went to Florida was when I was too young to remember, so I've been meaning to go back."

And then, Dream has the worst idea he's ever had.

He's lucky that before he can open his lips and let the question slip free he and George run into their professor.

"Oh, Davidson! Just who I was looking for," he says, barely even sparing Dream a glance. "We couldn't start the exam without you."

George runs his fingers through fluffy hair. He laughs, but it's different than how he did on the walk over. It sounds forced compared to the genuine bouts of laughter from earlier. *He's nervous*, Dream thinks. Before he can get himself in too deep, George breaks the strained silence.

"Yes, Dream and I got into a minor accident on the way over. I hope it's alright that we're a bit late?" he says, words turning into a question at the end of his sentence, though it isn't really one at all.

The older man nods immediately, like George was ridiculous to ever think it could be an issue that he was late for the most important test of the year. Dream won't lie and say he's not a bit curious about it all, but he bites his tongue and accepts the pardon like anyone else would.

He supposes he understands why people act the way they do around George. He's an objectively attractive person, features defined by sharp contours and blushing skin. Most people would be a bit more lenient with him. Dream is all for it if he too can reap the benefits, like he is right now.

As they follow him into the lecture hall, Dream falls back to walk with George. Before they sit down, he brings his lips down to George's ear. He's a fair bit taller, but saying he has to do something as dramatic as crouch would be absurd.

"Wait around for me after you finish up, okay? I have something I wanna ask you," Dream whispers. While he does look a bit taken-aback, George simply nods before finding his seat and leaving Dream to do the same.

Reluctantly, he does just that.

The test could have been worse. Dream is lucky he's good at math, because if he wasn't there's no way he would have passed.

See, he was distracted the whole time he was taking it. He couldn't stop thinking about George and how he would be an absolutely perfect fake boyfriend. He wasn't going home over break to begin with, and the fact that he wanted to go to Florida really just put the nail in the coffin.

Dream drops his test off at his professor's desk before he steps out into the hall. As promised, George is there waiting for him. He hasn't been there for more than ten minutes, but still the gesture is kind.

"I—" Dream begins, before backtracking. "Actually, do you wanna grab coffee or something? I owe you from earlier."

If he's offended by the gesture, George doesn't show it. There would be no reason for him to be, but Dream has seen people get much angrier over much less, so he takes his victory in stride.

"Sure, why not. It's kind of like a celebration for finishing our exams," George says.

Dream laughs involuntarily. He didn't say anything funny, so he's not sure why. With an over-the-top gesture, he points George towards the door as he follows. There's a Starbucks right next door to the math building, because of course there is, so the pair naturally make their way over to it in relative silence.

It's not awkward when they rattle off their orders or when Dream pays for two overpriced drinks. It wouldn't really be Christmas season without spending a bit too much money on drinks labeled as festive anyways.

With his hot tea in one hand and whatever monstrous concoction George ordered for himself in the other, Dream navigates back to the seats George claimed for them. The store looks relatively empty for the first time in the months Dream has been here. He's not a frequent customer by any means, but he understands the appeal.

George does too, based on his apparent familiarity with the store. He's wasted no time making himself comfortable in his oversized chair. He takes a large gulp of his drink, an oat milk peppermint *something*, before opening his mouth.

"So what was it you wanted to ask me?" he asks before taking yet another swig. Evidently, he needed the caffeine.

Dream clears his throat, setting his cup down on the table separating them. His hands shake, so he hides them in the sleeves of his sweatshirt.

"I— listen, you're gonna have to hear me out here," he stutters.

George looks confused, but he affirms Dream with a slow nod and urges him to continue regardless.

"God, I'm going to sound insane," he says with a scoff. "It's a long story that I can explain later if you want me to, but basically I told my mom I had a boyfriend to get her off my back when I definitely don't."

He raises his eyebrows at Dream from across the table, but George doesn't look angry in the slightest. "So what? You just need me to pretend to be your boyfriend in a picture or something? That's not a big deal at all, I really don't mind."

Dream doesn't quite have the heart to break it to George. He wishes it were that simple, that all he needed was a staged photo or two to satisfy his mom.

"Uh, not exactly," he says with a grimace. Dream is hopeful, but he's not blindly optimistic. If he's able to pull this off he will owe George for the rest of his life. "It's not — how do I say this — it's a bit worse than what you're thinking."

It seems that George hasn't quite grasped the full extent of what Dream is asking of him. He brings his drink up to his lips and takes a measured sip before clearing his throat to respond.

"I'm not sure I understand what you want Dream," he says. "You're going to have to spell it out for me. I'm sure it's not as bad as you think it is, really."

Dream finds it humorous, because it really *is* that bad. This is the type of thing that only happens in shitty Hallmark movies. Somehow he's landed himself right in the middle of one, surrounded by bright lights and a camera poised at his face recording every last movement down to bitten lips and a reddening face.

He sighs. *It's now or never.* "I'm supposed to bring my boyfriend home with me for Christmas."

"But you just said you don't have a boyfriend?"

And therein lies the issue. George realizes it the second the words fall from his lips, realization flashing across his features like he's been caught in the stage lights too. "Oh."

With pursed lips, Dream inhales with a nod. "That's where you come in."

Any person in their right mind would laugh in his face. He's asking something absurd, a scheme warranting hours of careful planning and flawless execution, of a man he met today on the way to a statistics exam.

Instead, George does something that not even Dream expected. He *agrees*.

"You know what, why not. It's not like I have anything else to do."

He can't help the chuckle that works its way free from his lips. "Are you serious? I thought for sure you were going to laugh in my face."

"Mhm, I'm serious," he says. "But on one condition."

Dream falls over himself to accept, because he truly cannot believe his bullshit scheme is actually going to work. "Yeah, of course. I owe you so fucking much, holy shit, thank you George. Whatever it is you want, I'll figure it out. Thank you."

George looks like he means business. He's set his drink down on the table between them and he's resting his chin atop interlaced fingers. His eyes narrow, staring deep into Dream's, before he wets his lips with his tongue and begins to speak.

"We're going to Harry Potter World."

It's less awkward than he thought it would be.

Granted, that's not saying much given the circumstances. Still, Dream will take all the small victories he can get, starting with George.

That night, they go back to their dorms. Dream has already packed most of his things for the trip, so he finds himself helping George.

Helping is a generous term. He packs George's bags while he lays in bed and plays games on his phone that make no logical sense. Dream tries to chastise him, but he's not really in a position to complain, so it doesn't quite work as intended. Somehow, he's not even mad about it. They're able to talk through the details of the trip as Dream works and George does whatever he does.

As proposed by Dream, they came up with and agreed upon a list of rules.

Don't get found out.

Don't tell anyone it's all fake.

Don't fall in love.

They were simple, and they were unbreakable. Both Dream and George agreed that they were getting along well, and the easiest way to ruin a new friendship is unreciprocated feelings. After the two week trip was through they could go back to normal, whatever that meant for them. Dream

would make up some sob story to tell his family about being dumped or cheated on and he would be in the clear.

It's a flawless plan, really. Dream doesn't see how it could go wrong.

It's a bit past 7 am, and things are already off the rails. He and George were supposed to pack his car and leave an hour ago, but instead Dream is banging on a cheaply made wooden door and calling the phone number he hasn't yet made a contact for on repeat.

To be fair, George did say he was a heavy sleeper, but Dream didn't expect anything like *this*. He's lucky when George finally opens the door to his room.

"The fuck do you want?" he asks groggily. His hair sticks out in every possible direction and he's still blinking the sleep from his eyes.

"We were supposed to be on the road an hour ago dumbass," Dream says, but there's no real venom in his voice. "It's an eleven hour drive."

That serves as the shock George needs to wake him up. "What the fuck do you mean an eleven hour drive? We're going to Florida, not Canada."

"Funny joke George. Now get your shit together and let's get going," Dream says, because there's no way he's being serious right now.

"I'm not kidding," he says as he grabs the duffel Dream so conveniently left right next to his door the night before. "Are you fucking with me or something?"

Dream scoffs. "Come on, stop it with that. How long did you think the drive would be?"

George takes a moment to respond. He and Dream make their way to the staircase while he contemplates his answer, starting their descent down the flights of stairs.

"I don't know, like four hours? I always thought Americans were lying when they talked about going on road trips."

Holy shit, he's being serious. Dream absolutely loses it, laughing in a way sure to wake up anyone else still on campus for some reason. He nearly trips, stumbling into the railing meant to hold him up. A panicked grasp from George is able to keep him upright somehow, and it's then he notices George is laughing too.

He takes a moment to catch his breath before even attempting to get words out, knowing they'll just be replaced with a wheeze.

"So, let me get this straight," he says while regaining his composure. "You thought *every single American* was lying about going on road trips?"

Bashfully, George nods. “To be fair, I haven’t actually thought about it in a while.”

“Nothing’s gonna save you now George, this is so embarrassing for you,” Dream says as he follows the Brit out of the stairwell and towards the parking lot.

“Who are you gonna tell? Do you have another fake boyfriend I don’t know about or something, Dream?” he asks. It’s meant to sting, at least a little bit, but Dream really can’t take anything George says seriously right now.

He tells him just as much, and he’s met with a playful punch to his shoulder in response.

“Where’s your car, Dream?” George asks as he looks around the parking lot with a bag in his hand. “All I see is this ugly old van.”

“Very funny George, now throw your shit in the back so we can get going,” Dream says as he pulls a matching set of Ford keys out of his pocket.

This is apparently very funny to George, based on the rapid onset of his giggling fit. “This is a sick joke,” he says through shaky exhales. “You’re making fun of me because of the time thing, surely.”

Dream wishes he was.

“You wanna go to Harry Potter World, don’t you, George?”

He nods far too solemnly for the circumstances. Dream will have to remember to make fun of him for it once they’re on the road.

“So get your ass in the ugly old van and buckle up. We’re going on a road trip.”

To George’s dismay, the drive really is eleven hours. He didn’t believe it until Dream’s phone read it out loud, and even then he was a bit skeptical, but three hours in and barely past state lines he’s left with no other option but to accept it.

“Oh look, a McDonald’s,” George says, gesturing to the exit sign coming into view.

“You’ve pointed out every single restaurant we’ve passed for the last hour. I know you’re hungry,” Dream deadpans.

“So why haven’t we stopped yet?” George asks. “I wanted to get breakfast, but you vetoed that idea too.”

He sighs. “I want to eat actual food, not unhealthy shit.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Dream sees George perk up. “So if I find us a ‘*real restaurant*’, whatever that means, we can stop and eat?”

Dream knows denying George would mean watching his face fall and listening to complaints meant to get on his nerves for the next few hours. He's not as stoic as the front he puts on would indicate.

"Sure, I don't see why not."

George wastes no time getting to work. Within five minutes he has a list of acceptable restaurants compiled in his notes app, sorted both by price and distance. He's nothing if not dedicated.

Dream briefly listens to the options presented by George before picking one that he deems acceptable. It's a local diner that sounds reasonably cheap without sacrificing quality. George calls him insane, but Dream likes to feel good about what he eats. It's just another thing to be added to the neverending list of "*things about Dream that make zero fucking sense*," as titled by George. Who else?

For someone who knows nothing about how to drive, George is surprisingly good at giving directions. In less than ten minutes he's pulling into a parking space in front of a well-loved building. It's an odd time of day to be eating — half past ten a.m. — but they're both too hungry to pay the miniscule fact any mind.

"God, it smells so good in here," George says as he follows Dream through the door. He's right, the scents of fried eggs and maple syrup and everything else delicious wafting through the air.

They have time to seat themselves in a cushy-looking booth and begin a vivid debate on the best thing to drink in the morning before someone takes note of their presence.

"It doesn't even give you any energy, so I really don't—"

Dream clears his throat. A waitress stands expectantly at the end of their table, notepad in one hand and pen in the other. George looks taken aback at Dream's interruption at first, but the second he realizes its purpose his eyes widen and lips seal themselves shut.

"If y'all are all finished up," she says, shooting a pointed look in George's direction, "is there anything I can get you started with?"

"I'll just have some water, thank you," Dream says with a curt nod.

"Can you make a vanilla latte?" George asks. After the girl slowly nods, he continues speaking. "I'll have that then. Also, some menus would be great."

The second she's out of earshot, they pick up with the argument they postponed. Dream simply doesn't understand how George can stomach the taste of coffee. George thinks Dream is a pussy for letting a few roasted beans scare him away from a valuable source of caffeine. Neither have emerged as a clear winner by the time their waitress is back with their drinks and menus.

"My name's Olivia. Give me a shout if you need *anything* at all," she says, though the end of her statement seemed more directed at Dream than his scowling counterpart.

It doesn't take very long for George to scan the menu he's been given and make his decision. He wasn't lying about being hungry, based on the way he drains his cup before Dream's even managed to take two sips of water.

"What are you getting?" Dream asks.

"Chocolate chip pancakes, obviously," George says with an exaggerated eye roll. Dream chuckles

to himself. “What's so funny, Dream?”

He shakes his head under the heat of George's stare. “Nothing really. That's just so on brand for you. I don't know why I even expected something else.”

His words may have been scathing if delivered differently, but the silken southern honey coating Dream's throat wraps itself around everything he says until the golden sweetness drips from his flushed lips. If the circumstances were different he might have let himself acknowledge the seemingly obvious root of his actions, but rules are rules.

In a way that's far too dramatic given the scenario, George lets out an exasperated sigh and slouches into his seat. “I assume you're getting grilled chicken or something else just as ridiculous.”

“What's wrong with grilled chicken?”

“And somehow you're the one calling me predictable.”

A comfortable silence settles between them. There doesn't always need to be something said when two people can understand each other wordlessly. It's anything but resentful when George's eyes twinkle mischievously and he makes his order much more complicated than it needs to be, much to Olivia's annoyance. It's a sense of being at peace when Dream has to bite his lip with a smile to stop himself from bursting out in laughter.

He orders an omelette, much to George's apparent disdain, but something within him has a hunch that George doesn't really mind. They fall into banter with a naturalness like they've known each other for years. It's not even been 24 hours.

George kicks Dream's feet beneath the table and vehemently denies the fact above it. Dream blows his straw wrapper at him in retaliation. George's eyes fill with faux tears and his body is wracked with feigned sobs. Not bursting out into obnoxious laughter takes all of Dream's willpower, and then some.

At the end of the day, they're still kids.

When his pancake smothered in chocolate, butter, syrup, and *god knows what else* is sat in front of him, George's face lights up. Childish delight doesn't cease to exist the second someone turns 18, and George is the perfect example of that fact. Dream's food looks delicious too, as he lets Olivia know with a grin, but he's nowhere near George's level of excitement.

He almost comments on the irony of the situation, but something about the way George's eyes gleam and his cheeks blush a pale rose tells him to stay silent. Between every bite he looks up, eyes meeting Dream's without fail. The color gracing his cheeks deepens each time, and still Dream won't look away.

It's with chocolate smeared on his face and a fork approaching his mouth that George says something.

“What?”

Dream has the audacity to act just as confused. “Huh?”

George rolls his eyes with a pointed exhale. Dream notices the way the corners of his eyes crinkle even when he tries to act like he doesn't care.

They are content to eat in relative silence, talking through pointed glances and exaggerated gestures. Dream isn't sure he's ever felt quite as at home as he does in this empty diner hundreds of miles from either of the places he would claim as his own with a relative stranger sitting across the table from him.

The implications of it are resounding.

The scariest thing about it all is the way he can't say he's afraid.

The solemnity is interrupted by a harsh voice asking if it'll be on separate checks or all together. George says together with a grin that can only be described as mischievous before Dream even has the chance to get in a word lengthwise. He's alright with it.

It's an overly dramatic sigh as he pulls his wallet out and hands his credit card over to the waitress. He swears he sees her eyes gleam when they meet his own in a way that could only be described as intentional. Dream is the first to look away, bringing his eyes back to meet George's instead.

"I'll bring your check right out honey," she says, a southern drawl making it difficult to discern what's flirting and what's nothing more than a force of habit. Dream — for a reason he can't name — hopes it's the latter.

His fingers drum across the tabletop. It's an anxious habit of his, not that Dream has ever been able to sit still even when his mind is perfectly at ease. Sneakers squeak harshly against slick tile when George rests his hand on top of Dream's. The feeling of George's cool skin serves as a welcome distraction.

The harsh clatter of a plastic dish landing on faux granite breaks the moment's immersion.

"Here you are," Olivia says, sliding the check towards Dream. She leans in, far too close for a stranger, before speaking in a tone much more hushed than the droning voice he's become accustomed to. "I put my phone number on the back there, just for you."

George's grip on Dream's hand tightens as he clears his throat. He's staring daggers, but Olivia returns the sharp gaze without hesitation.

"I would appreciate it if you didn't flirt with my boyfriend, *honey*," George says. The nickname sounds scathing on his tongue, nothing like it did with drawn-out vowels and an air of southern charm. "So you can run along, and we'll be on our way out."

After a second's time, she nods and walks away with an impressive amount of speed. Dream's stomach is hit with a pang of *something* he refuses to place.

The silence between them is resounding as Dream signs the bill and follows George out of the door, but their hands don't lose each other until they reach opposite sides of the car. With the doors closed and ignition running, Dream takes it upon himself to be the first to speak.

"Thank you for that back there." He buckles his seatbelt and shifts into reverse. "I really didn't want the attention she was giving me."

George spares him from the embarrassment of causing a lingering silence like he's done so many times before. "What, a pretty boy like you isn't used to being flirted with?"

If he could see himself, Dream would blush even redder than he is. Instead, he pulls out of the parking lot and wills the heat he feels running up his neck and across his face to subside. He's not sure why George's words have such an effect on him when the waitress already fading from his

memory didn't cause any reaction of significance.

"Are you seriously blushing right now?" George asks. "From what? Me calling you pretty?"

Dream does not respond. He's chosen his dignity.

George is delighted with his discovery. "I actually can't believe you. How the hell do you expect to handle me acting like your boyfriend when calling you cute is too much?" *Not very well.* "We need to prepare or something, honestly."

He can't tell whether he should deny George with every fiber of his being or accept him with open arms and an agreeable temperament. Dream's mouth makes the decision for him with heart-fueled words and not an ounce of thought.

"Let's do it. I'm gonna be the best damn boyfriend you've ever had."

The sentiment is taken to heart. Over the endless expanses of asphalt they craft a false reality that instills a sense of saudade within Dream that should terrify him.

Rule 3: Don't fall in love.

He hasn't broken it yet. He won't break it, not when he made a promise to George.

When George's grin splits his face and his eyes glisten with laughter, Dream is not afraid.

It's easiest if we keep it simple; believable, is what George told Dream. He can't argue that fact, not that he would have reason to.

Together, they weave a story of a math class crush turning into a study partner. Stolen kisses and timid confessions make their way into the mix, and by the end of September the word *boyfriend* feels more correct than anything else. It's all a lie, of course, but it's one based in enough reality that it's not completely out of reach.

It would probably be easier for Dream if it was. Instead, he can picture a fast moving teenage romance that he longs for with a man he can't have, not truly.

The sun has long since set when Dream turns onto familiar roads marred with uneven pavement

and greenery sprouting between the cracks. His mom had texted him hours ago saying she was going to bed and he and George would be staying in his childhood bedroom.

The issue is, Dream only has one bed.

It's just a full, at that. She must have assumed it would be okay given their relationship, so Dream really has no place to protest. George is small enough. They can make it work.

Speaking of George, he blinks sleep out of his heavy-lidded eyes with a yawn and a stretch of his arms. He made the wise decision to get ahead on his sleep towards the end of the ride, something Dream didn't have the luxury of doing.

Shit. He doesn't know about the bed.

Dream makes the decision to bite his tongue and let George figure it out for himself. It's something bolder than cowardice but warmer than friendship that drives him, a feeling he's not quite ready to name.

Beneath his tires, the road transforms into gravel that leads him home. The glow of headlights illuminates a quaint house that's all too familiar. In a way that's sickeningly comfortable, Dream shifts into park with a hand that's only slightly too forceful and pulls his keys from the ignition.

"We're here George," he says, voice akin to a whisper. "Grab your shit from the back and follow me. Everyone's already asleep."

Something only able to be described as offense flashes across George's face. "Why can't you get my bags?"

"Because I have to get my own?"

Underneath the indigo sky and a hal-full moon, George's eyes gleam. "Maybe I want more than just going to Harry Potter World, now that I'm thinking about—"

"—Oh wow, I have so much more room in my arms than I thought I did! I can fit both of our bags in them, George."

His grin is well-concealed, but Dream is able to pick up on the smugness nevertheless. An empty-handed George follows Dream to the front door in delight, waiting patiently as he sets down far too many bags to reach for his keys.

After a minimal struggle, the door is closed behind them. Dream walks the path he hasn't in months, up the stairs that always creaked too much and down the hall he spent his childhood running through. George follows close behind, eyes wandering over the unfamiliar environment. An occupied hand gestures towards a closed door, and with a wordless nod of confirmation George twists the knob and opens a portal to Dream's youth.

It's exactly how he left it. The barren walls make the room feel far bigger than it really is, broken up only by an overflowing bookcase and sparsely-covered bed wedged into the corner like an afterthought. He steps inside, letting George close the door behind him, before setting down their bags next to a dresser he forgot even existed.

"So..." Dream begins hesitantly, eyes tracking George's each and every movement. His head turns, surveying his new surroundings, before he makes a move to sit down on the foot of the mattress. An expectant look draws Dream in closer, until he's poised beside George on top of navy blue sheets that were picked out years ago. "What do you think?"

“I’m too tired to think properly.”

With that, George leans in until his head is resting on Dream’s shoulder. He doesn’t have to lean down very much.

“I’m nervous for tomorrow. What if we don’t look like a real couple? What if they know?” Dream questions, worry marring his mind and seeping into his usually calm voice.

George hums idly before responding. “We could always just practice doing couple shit. That way you can work your nerves out before it ever really begins.”

Practice? Surely not...

Dream clears his throat, causing George to lift his head from where he was resting it and quirk an eyebrow. “What do you mean by practice? Because I’m not really too sure how we can—”

“—Shut up.”

And then a pair of lips quells all the questions that dance on the tip of his tongue. George’s hand runs through his hair and taps along his cheekbone in a way that’s both reassuring and commanding. Dream has no protests, leaning into the kiss with a twinge in his heart and a thigh beneath his hand.

In a strange room, in a strange state, in a strange country, George kisses Dream.

On his bed he’s had since middle school, in his childhood home, in the place he grew up, Dream kisses George.

Restraint has never been something Dream would consider himself well-versed in until now. He’s careful to only take what he’s given, a gentle press of lips against his own and the light presence of a hand against his cheek. He knows he wants more, won’t be satisfied once he knows what’s almost within reach, but he can’t do anything but sit and give himself up to George.

Dream isn’t the first to pull away. That honor goes to George for breaking up the *practice* with an impressive yawn followed by a fit of laughter he tries his best to subdue. It’s a hopeless effort when Dream joins in, eyes tearing up from laughter and cheeks aching with undiluted joy.

If he had half a mind, Dream would be bitter. The sweet feeling of lips against his own was broken up by an urge as human as the need for sleep. Instead, he laughs.

“I’m going to sleep. You can have fun unpacking our shit,” George says with a sigh before flopping down onto the worn sheets still in the clothes he travelled in.

“We’ll deal with it in the morning, *together*,” Dream says, following George until he’s falling down, down, *down*. His head hits a pillow that he never really liked and he’s covered in a sheet far too thin to hold off the cool air that will inevitably find him.

It’s an almost unintelligible whisper. “Goodnight Dream. Sleep well.”

There’s nowhere near enough space separating them and nothing but George’s velvet lips running through his mind as he blinks his eyes shut and wills himself to do just that.

“Goodnight George.”

Chapter End Notes

hope u enjoyed
currently and am working on 3 + the epilogue so expect those within the next few weeks !! i'm still undecided on whether or not to put smut in this so if you have thoughts either way be sure to let me hear em in the comments !!!!! that's mostly it i think as always bookmarks and comments and user subs and all that are nice and let me know you enjoyed

i have ch 2 finished

hometown

Chapter Notes

hi! i'm back!

the response on ch 1 has been AMAZING and I'm so happy people like it so far. only one more to go after this one + an epilogue and then we're done

enjoy! see y'all in the end notes <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He was right. The blanket was nowhere near warm enough to stave off the chill that rarely settles over Florida.

At least, that's what Dream tells himself when he wakes up far too early with his arms pulling George into his chest and their legs impossibly tangled together. It's only weird if he makes it weird. They're supposed to be dating, they've even kissed, so some cuddling shouldn't be a big deal.

He's surrounded in warmth and it's not yet sunny out, so Dream lets himself be recaptured by the gentle embrace of sleep.

He's lucky he didn't have to deal with the awkwardness of waking up with another wrapped in his arms. Dream's mother made sure of that, carelessly walking in on the two boys engulfed in each other.

Of course, Dream offered his apologies to George for the sudden and unexpected introduction, but he didn't seem very phased by it all.

This is how Dream finds himself lounging in the living room while George offers to help make breakfast for the tenth time. He won't be successful, something Dream knows from years of family holidays, but it's endearing how he persists nevertheless.

"Thank you for your kindness, but it's alright. I work better alone anyways, I wouldn't want you getting bothered by me."

Voices drift down the narrow hallway, occasionally finding Dream's ears through the delirious haze surrounding him. Driving for as long as he did is tiring, and focusing for the same amount of time is even more so. It's because of this that he lets George fend for himself in the family

department. His sister must be sleeping in — something he wishes he had the privilege of doing — so it's just him, his parents, and George downstairs.

Just as he's about to venture into the kitchen to try and rescue George from whatever he's surely gotten himself into, a mop of sleep-mussed hair peeks out from behind a corner.

"My mom finally kick you out?" Dream asks, bringing a hand to his lips in a failed attempt to smother the yawn that follows.

His cheeks are painted a tender pink, likely blushing from whatever horrendous line of questioning George was submitted to during his attempt at being helpful. Dream wants to feel bad, but he's inclined to thank the party responsible for the sight instead.

"I decided to give up, actually," George responded with a matter-of-fact tone that didn't convince Dream of anything for a second. "She seemed more keen on grilling me about our relationship than putting me to use in the kitchen."

He can't help but grin at the statement, but his stomach turns all the same. With a raised eyebrow and the eye contact of an unspoken agreement, he prods deeper. "Oh, and how did that go?"

"I told her everything she wanted to know and more, just like the amazing boyfriend I am."

Dream's silence prompts George to elaborate as he makes himself comfortable on the couch directly to Dream's left. Two pairs of eyes quickly dart to the entrance, checking for any signs of life beyond the kitchen, before speaking in significantly more hushed tones.

"Just the basics, mostly. How we met, some stuff about me, why I couldn't go home, how long we've been together, that sort of thing. It felt like a job interview or visa application or something, honestly. Nothing we didn't expect."

Dream grimaces. Leave it to his mother to milk George for all he's worth not even an hour after meeting him for the first time. "I'm sorry you had to face that alone. She gets a little..." His words trail off as Dream thinks of the most polite way to say what he wants without watering down the sentiment. "She's always been more *comfortable* with me having girlfriends. It's not your fault."

Without missing a beat, George responds with compassion in his eyes. "Don't worry, I get it completely. You can't control it, so please don't apologize. If anything, I feel sorry for you. At least I was able to put an ocean between my issues."

Their eyes lock, and Dream can feel himself pushing meaningless lists out of the way to make room for the blossoming inside him. He forces himself to go over each numbered item with painstaking accuracy. It's too early to fall apart.

Just as his lips part, no doubt ushering out a gratitude-filled response, a shout from the kitchen announcing that food's ready breaks up the moment's ambiance and loses the words on the tip of his tongue.

It's with a mutual understanding that they walk into the kitchen as a unit, ready to face whatever may be thrown at them.

It's not as bad as Dream predicted, but that doesn't make it *good* by any means.

Not five minutes into breakfast his dad worriedly asks if bringing home a guy means he doesn't like girls anymore. His mom, notably, does nothing. It takes a clearly forced cough from his sister to break up the silence and allow the conversation to continue, avoiding the elephant in the room.

He wants to brush it off, he really does, but it's not that easy. George squeezes his hand beneath the table as Bailey goes off on a tangent about how pointless her exams were, given that she's not even in high school yet. Dream nods along like the good older brother he is, but his thumb rubs circles across the back of George's hand.

It's not until all the dishes are rinsed off and the food is put away that they can be alone. He gets an apologetic look from his mother as he follows George up the stairs, but it's not enough to ease the hurt.

He pulls the door shut behind himself quietly. George is quick to comfort him.

"Are you okay, Dream? You seemed off."

His sigh is weighed down, heavy with the melancholic waves radiating from his core.

"I'm fine, it's not like I didn't expect someone to say something shitty. I just hoped it wouldn't be so soon, I guess."

Not a second passes before Dream can feel George's arms wrapping around his neck and pulling him in closer. His touch is gentle yet commandeering, a warm embrace that invites him to let go of everything he's been holding back for so long. He allows himself to relax into the touch, a tentative hand hovering over the small of George's back, closing the distance.

It's reminiscent of the way he woke up in the middle of the night, but this time Dream feels no shame in pulling George closer with a shaky inhale. It's a wordless understanding, a situation that's unavoidable but hurts just the same when it inevitably comes to fruition.

A voice in the back of Dream's head tells him to get out, stop while he still has the chance to salvage something from the wreckage that's sure to follow.

He lets George hold him still.

The remainder of the day is spent in a haze somewhere between asleep and awake. George is kind enough to tell a half-truth about travel exhaustion to prying family members waiting just outside his door. His mother learned her lesson that morning, with the other two soon to follow.

He's content like this. Legs interlaced and arms strewn across cold bodies in a bed that's far too small for two fully grown men, groggy whispers floating through the air, meaningless conversations occupying the time spent falling back asleep; it's too good to be true.

It's true how they waste the day with each other, and it's true when the night sky overtakes the daylight and with it sleep overtakes them.

Dream is allowed a much more pleasant awakening today. It starts with a foot brushing against his own. *Cold.*

Next it's a hand resting lightly against his forearm. He's warmer than he was yesterday, somehow.

Then Dream feels soft hair prick at the junction between his neck and jaw. It smells vaguely of peppermint and a flickering fire. He inhales deeper, taking the scent in fully. His arm pulls whatever lies in front of him closer and closer until there's not a single point where they're disconnected.

He's a lot bigger. Dream can cradle the heat within himself like it's what he was designed to do. His lanky frame encloses the source of comfort closer still.

And then the warmth moves back. His touch is a catalyst for fingertips drumming across bare skin and legs slowly untangling themselves from his own. Threadbare sheets that he really ought to replace let the wintertime chill seep deep into his bones when they're lifted. Slowly, carefully, *painfully*, the warmth abandons him.

At the last moment, Dream blinks open sleep-laden lids. He's just barely able to catch George slipping silently out the door, leaving him cold and alone.

He makes the executive decision to wait a bit before following George. It's not an easy one — his body longing for the sense of completeness that George fulfilled so perfectly — but Dream's logical mind wins out in the end.

So, he waits. He thinks about a lot of things, absolutely none of them involving the way George's legs didn't weigh him down while he slept, how his significantly smaller hands couldn't even come close to overlapping Dream's, and definitely not reminding himself of his quickly-crumbling resolve to keep his word.

He's fine.

He is, in fact, *not* fine.

It has everything to do with George. The second Dream walks into the kitchen he's greeted by a flour-coated wave from George and an apologetic smile from his mother.

"What's all this?" he asks with a yawn, eyes scanning the scene presented to him.

By the time George answers, he's pieced the majority of it together. "We're baking cookies! Well, you and I are."

A raised eyebrow is directed in his mother's direction. She's baked the cookies for as long as Dream can remember, and it's so incredibly unlike her to let someone else commandeer the process. Hell, George tried to help with breakfast yesterday and he was unsuccessful in that.

"I've just got so much on my plate with hosting Christmas for Bailey's friends in a few days and our annual celebration, so when George told me you two could take over the cookies while I run some errands I just had to take him up on his offer. You've seen me do it so many times so you'll be good alone, right Dream?"

He's not even given the chance to respond with more than a hesitant nod before she's shouting her goodbyes and closing the front door behind her.

Dream sighs. "You know how to bake at least a little bit, right?"

"Oh, not at all," George says all too enthusiastically. "But your mom said you know how to make cookies, so we should be good." Dream doesn't confirm or deny. "Right?"

Dream pulls open the drawer he knows holds baking supplies. Wordlessly, he passes a stack of measuring cups and an apron to George before taking one for himself at random. His solemn gaze sends a wave of chill through the air when his eyes meet George's.

"We're so fucked."

"It's just cookies, I'm sure it can't be that hard," George says optimistically. "Your dad's somewhere in the house if we need help, anyways. We've got this."

Heavily, Dream sighs. "Neither of us have any idea of how to bake in the slightest. Hell, do you even know how to use American measurements?" George shakes his head. "And we're doing this completely alone. The odds are stacked against us."

Determined hands fasten a red tie around George's waist with excessive force. "I'm not giving up without a fight. Tie up that apron and pass me the flour, lover boy."

The flour is winning.

Actually, it's more that he and George are losing. It's kind of difficult for flour to fight back. To be completely objective, it's not entirely their fault. Dream's mom *knew* how inept he was when it came to the kitchen, and yet she still delegated the task to him and George. If she thought George would be any better because of his enthusiasm, she was sorely mistaken.

It's with flour splattered across his face and a smear of frosting on his lips that he slides the final tray of cookies — if they could even be called that — into the oven and slams the door shut with a triumphant grin.

"We did it!"

Dream doesn't have the heart to remind him that they still have to frost the cookies after they bake and cool down. "*I* did it, you just ogled me and ate frosting the whole time."

George, at least, has the decency to feign outrage. "Not true! I rolled out the dough too."

He doesn't deny the ogling. Dream shouldn't be as pleased with the fact as he is, a satisfied grin spreading across his frosting-stained lips.

"Oh right, like that makes a difference." He takes a step, all the closer. The small of George's back is pressed against an uncomfortable countertop, but he seems to pay it no mind. "I'm still not convinced you didn't wipe this flour on your face on purpose just to look like you did something."

"I'm above that and you know it. Don't drag me into your little fantasies." *Too late*. "If anything, the fact that I have flour on my face and you don't just means that I did more work than you."

"Are you sure about that?" A hand cages George in from one side. "Because I don't think I am, honestly."

"Mhm, I am," he stutters. It's one of the first times he's heard George anything but confident. It has everything to do with the way Dream leans his weight forward until there's a decidedly not-platonic amount of space between them.

"I think you put it there just so I would do *this*," Dream says, voice husky. He raises his free hand to George's face, and in a way that's so painstakingly slow, wipes the excess flour off of his freckled cheeks. His thumb meanders along until finding the tip of George's nose, a final touch deflecting off of the furiously pink skin. "Am I right?"

George's throat bobs. Dream can hear him swallow nervously. He doesn't shy away, and Dream doesn't move his hand. They're frozen in a sick sort of limbo, where breaking out means breaking promises far too early.

One, two, three, Dream thinks. He won't let himself be the one to ruin it. God, he wants to be the one to ruin it.

Before he can do something he'll regret, Dream tears his gaze away from stained lips and backs away. The room's air changes noticeably, a current humming in the space where they inhabit. George quirks an eyebrow and begins to open his mouth in question.

It's then that the flour-covered hand swings around to hit him square on the ass by way of Dream. A moment of shock comes first, but it's quickly ushered out with the urgency of a biting tone.

"Oh, you're so fucked."

They burn the cookies. George tries to force a grin and choke one down, but the spluttering coughs that follow the second it hits his tongue give him away instantly. When the scene is discovered, two boys covered in flour handprints and colorful smears standing next to a pile of cookies burnt beyond recovery, it's with an expected disappointment.

The outcome had been visible from miles off, so the boys are dismissed with bouts of laughter and colorful skin. They were relegated to only minor side jobs that kept them as far away from the scene of disaster as possible.

George seems content to spend the day decorating with Dream, even if his original plan fell through.

Dream is just glad he gets to spend the day filled with a boyish infatuation, even if he knows it can't truly last like he wants.

The next day follows a similar pattern to the last. They wake up, and George leaves first. Dream waits to follow him. He's reluctant to admit — even if it's just to himself — that he's hurt by it.

He's able to ignore it, for now. He only has to make it through a few more days, and then he'll be free to pine from afar instead of the painful alternative he's suffering through currently. His family isn't helping.

His mom has the *wonderful* idea to put them on decorating duty. It doesn't seem like an issue, at first, but Dream quickly realizes the glaring flaw.

George isn't tall enough to put up the lights. Or the wreaths. Or the garlands. Or anything, really. It's not his fault that the house was designed for people well over six feet tall, but it does cause some inconveniences. That's not even the worst part, though. It's that he's far too stubborn to ever admit the fact.

This leads to more than a few awkward situations.

The first is when they're pulling boxes of decorations from a storage closet. There's quite a few boxes — Dream's family tends to go all out the holidays — so it only makes sense that they would start from the very top and work their way down. George, always so enthusiastically helpful, is the first to reach for a bin filled with lights.

Dream stands just behind him, surveying the scene as it unfolds. It appears that George is struggling, at least it does to Dream. He's on his tiptoes, hands fully extended above his head and grasping at the slick plastic poised on top of a particularly high shelf. He lets out a frustrated huff as yet another tug fails to free the container like he'd hoped it would.

George stumbles, back colliding with Dream's chest, and his mind instantly goes back to the times he's woken up tangled together with George. He was smaller then too, and though it's not a very pronounced gap, he likes the way George fits into him so effortlessly.

“Need some help?” he teases. George sighs in an exaggerated way before accepting Dream’s offer wordlessly, backing away so Dream has more room to pull down the bin and set it behind him. He reaches up for the next box, this one at a much lower altitude, before he’s interrupted.

“I’ve got it Dream.”

He quirks an eyebrow smugly. “Are you sure? Because it seemed like you needed my help just a second ago.”

“You’re cuter when you shut up.”

Despite his reluctance to give Dream any sort of leverage over him, it’s nearly impossible for George to pretend like he’s not reliant on the taller of the two. It doesn’t help his case that they’re meant to be dating, either. Dream doesn’t mind it, not at all, but he can feel the way George prickles when he comes up behind him for the tenth time in the last hour to help straighten out a decoration.

He can’t outwardly display his discomfort, and Dream can’t let up. It’s not a very good feeling. Somewhere deep down Dream held onto the hope that George wanted this to be real just as much as he did, but when he stiffens at the slightest touch and goes silent every time Dream tries to say something romantic, he’s left with nowhere else to turn to but disappointment.

It’s cold outside, surprisingly. Even in December the temperature rarely drops below 60 degrees, so when it feels like something cold enough to freeze water, it’s a major shock. Both of them are dressed in a combination of sweatpants and random t-shirts, not equipped for the chill.

“Holy shit, it’s freezing,” Dream says as he follows George out the front door, a roll of lights in hand.

“This is cold to you?” he asks, shocked. “It’s like 50 out, that’s not bad at all.”

“Well George, not everyone grew up in the North Pole. Oh, maybe you’re an elf! That would explain your height.”

George glares at Dream very pointedly, setting down his lights on the porch. “You’re so creative, has anyone ever told you that?” He nods smugly, locating the end of his lights and making his way towards one of the two trees that framed the entryway.

“First it’s calling London the North Pole, which I don’t think I’ve ever heard before. We only get snow a few times a year, so you must have been really thinking hard to come up with that one. And then — of course — there’s the height joke. You must have been really proud of that one.” He sounds bitter, but not in a genuine way. Dream would say he knows George better than most, even if they’ve only known each other for five days, and he’s sure George is kidding. It’s nice to be able to joke around with someone and have the energy reciprocated without hesitation.

“Oh, would you like to do this instead?” Dream asks. His arms are fully extended as he wraps the string of lights around the top of a tree. While the tree is comparatively small, it’s a struggle for even Dream to fully encompass it in lights. George would have absolutely no shot.

“I’ll let you take this one. It seems like you’ve got it under control. I wouldn’t wanna mess it up, you know?”

Dream winds the line around leaves and branches that are somehow just as green as they were when he was last here, in August. “Alright, but only if you insist. I would hate to stop you from doing something that would be so easy for you.”

Despite the apparent cold, George doesn’t shiver. Dream does, the cool air hitting the sliver of exposed skin between the hem of his shirt and his waistband. His shirt really isn’t big enough. A glance over in George’s direction reveals cheeks blooming red and eyes darting up to meet his. George must be getting the worst of the wind for his face to look like it does, it’s practically the same color as the cookies they frosted yesterday. Dream can’t seem to locate anything on the ground for George to have been fixated on, so he chalks the movement up to his imagination and resumes covering the tree in front of him.

“You good back there George? I can give you something to do if you want,” he shouts over his shoulder.

“Oh, I’m okay. It’s fine,” George stutters in response. “I’m cool to just stand here.”

“Are you sure? You looked kinda cold. I can get you a sweatshirt or something, if you want. I’ve got a ton up in my room.”

“I’ll just go and grab one, it’s okay. Do you want me to bring you one too? Your shirt is a bit— uh, how do I— well, I can..”

“I’m alright, I’ll work up a sweat doing this anyways,” Dream says with a chuckle. He passes the wheel from one hand to another behind the tree, arms just barely able to connect. “Just take a sweatshirt from my closet. It’ll be warmer that way, since it’s for sure bigger than any of yours.”

George opens his mouth a few times to try and formulate a response, but he abandons the effort and instead nods simply, slipping inside the door and leaving Dream alone in the cold. He feels bad, though logically Dream knows he has nothing to feel bad for. George agreed to be here and do this, and if he was suddenly uncomfortable it’s solely on him to make Dream aware of the fact.

Still, part of him is guilty. He’s not been a saint when it comes to adhering to their rules, though he hasn’t exactly broken them either.

Don’t get found out.

Don’t tell anyone it’s all fake.

Don’t fall in love.

He hasn’t been discovered, and he certainly hasn’t told anyone the reality of their situation. The third, though. That’s what’s giving him trouble.

Surely, it’s too soon to call it love. He hasn’t even known George for a week. But how can he really know? He craves George’s presence whenever they’re apart, his heart drops every time he’s reminded of the true nature of their relationship, and he finds himself wishing it was real far too frequently.

Is he in love?

His heart skips a beat every time George bats his eyelashes at Dream. His cheeks burn red when George moves closer. His stomach twists as he lies through his teeth to his mother about everything. His hands shake when he thinks about what it could be like if it wasn't all an act.

Is that what love is?

Dream doesn't have time to mull it over, because George opens the door and steps into view. He's positively drowning in Dream's hoodie, black fabric slipping to reveal his collarbones and pooling around his hands. It takes every remaining bit of willpower he has not to kiss George then and there, but nobody's around so all his excuses are null and void.

"You find what you were looking for?" Dream asks, as if he doesn't have the answer standing perfectly in view.

"I did, thank you."

"Let's get these lights finished up before I die from hypothermia, then," Dream says gesturing to the second spool of lights George set down when he went inside. "I want hot chocolate, and we only get it once we're done out here."

It doesn't take as long as he would have predicted, surprisingly enough. George was more than willing to help, and within the hour the trees out front are twinkling in a way that evokes the holiday spirit.

"Those lights look nice boys," Dream's dad says as he makes himself comfortable with a mug in hand. If he doesn't comment on the fact that they're sitting pressed up against each other in a chair meant for one person, maybe it's for the better.

Dream takes a sip from his own cup of cocoa before responding. "Thanks. It was way colder out than I expected."

He grows warmer and warmer each time he drinks more of the molten chocolate. It warms him from the inside out, liquid travelling down his throat and lighting up his body. In a similar fashion, George's gentle touches set him ablaze. His hand brushes the top of Dream's thigh, his head leans on Dream's shoulder, his ankles are thrown across Dream's lap, and he's close to forgetting the chill that soaked into his bones completely.

His mom sets her cup down carefully onto a coaster, despite the hundreds of rings decorating the coffee table. "You two have been a huge help decorating today, especially with Bailey's party tomorrow. I really appreciate it."

"It's no problem, really," George says before Dream even has the chance to respond. "We make a good team."

His heart flutters for a brief second before he remembers that it's all an act put on by George. Dream wishes that weren't the case, so much, but he can't afford to delude himself before they've taken on the brunt of the work. Tomorrow should be fine, same with the day after. They can make excuses to get out of the house and "explore the city," not that there's anything to explore.

The real issue begins on Christmas Eve. As is tradition, the family will spend the day together preparing to host relatives the next day. And then comes Christmas. They'll be lucky to get more than five minutes alone, if that. Once those two have passed, Dream and George are free to make their way back up the coast to school, though not without a stop at Harry Potter World for George.

Dream realizes he must seem lost in thought. He's been quiet for the past few minutes while the conversation continues around him, but nobody's actually called him out on it yet.

"We're really happy together." George squeezes Dream's thigh, causing him to snap his head up and refocus. "Aren't we?"

"Oh yeah, mhm," he says unconvincingly. A pointed stare from George reminds him of the fact, so Dream elaborates further. "I'm really glad I met George, I have no clue what I would do without him."

He's not lying when he says it. George thinks he is, which is enough for Dream to be content. His mother smiles, his sister fakes a gag, his dad doesn't quite know how to react, and he's alright. George grins at Dream and rests his loose arm on top on Dream's chest. He looks like a man in love, and Dream almost believes him against every instinct he possesses.

"Well, I'm happy for the two of you," his mom says, shooting a glare that could kill at his sister. Dream laughs and reassures her that he really doesn't care about Bailey's teasing.

The conversation fades out slowly, eventually overtaken by grumbling stomachs. Dinner follows soon after, and before he knows it Dream is lying in bed — freshly showered — while George gets ready. He's taken the liberty of finding them another blanket, but to his surprise George insists that they don't need it. Dream won't protest if it means he has an excuse to pull George closer in the night like he wants.

There's not much chatter between them tonight. George seems tense. Dream doesn't push, leaves him to figure out whatever it is he needs to on his own. With backs turned towards each other and limbs craving the warm touch of another human, they fall asleep.

"What do you mean you've never been ice skating?"

"Why would I have?" The sound of shifting gravel beneath tires fills the air. "I grew up in Florida. We don't do that here."

George looks like it's the worst thing he's ever heard. "But it's *ice skating*? That's like, the best part of winter."

"I think the closest ice rink is more than two hours away," Dream says, hands spinning along the top of the wheel until he's pulled out onto the street. "I don't care if we have to be out of the house all day for my sister's thing, that's not happening."

"I haven't even asked to do anything yet," George protests indignantly.

Dream sighs, but it's not one of exasperation. It's a sickly sort of fondness coating each breath passing through his lips, dripping golden honey wherever it can. "Don't act like I don't know you. You were about to beg me to drive hours just to fall on my ass inside a cold warehouse."

He doesn't respond. Dream is right, he's always right, so George turns his head to gaze out the window while pulling his knees up to his chest. Dream doesn't have it in him to chastise him for putting his shoes on the seat. He would just make some snarky comment about how a dirty seat is the least of the van's problems and leave his feet exactly where they are.

It's a bit scary how well they've come to know each other over the past few days. George could have been a loner, an asshole, a thief, a serial killer, or anything equally as bad. Instead, he's a smart boy with a bubbly personality and a pretty face. Dream can't help but think that, somehow, he was meant to meet George like this.

They're forced together in the most unusual of circumstances that would cause most friendships to fracture eventually. The opposite has become their reality. Under pressure they only grow closer and stronger, and like carbon, Dream hopes they'll shine when the dust settles.

It's unrealistic. Yesterday, George flinched when Dream touched him. He went silent every time Dream tried to make conversation that implied anything more than platonic. When given the chance to see bare skin, he lowered his eyes and asked Dream to cover up in the most polite way possible.

Well, Dream's always been a bit too hopeful for his own good.

"Where are we even going?" George asks, smooth voice shattering the silence that wedged itself between them.

"I don't really know, honestly. I didn't do much planning beyond like, *leaving*, so..."

"Hm." He drums his fingers across the center console, slowly pushing into the space dividing him from Dream. "Didn't you tell your mom you wanted to show me around the town?"

"There's not really much to show, honestly. But I can try if you want?" Dream offers hesitantly. George nods, eyes gleaming in the corner of Dream's vision, before he responds.

"You can learn a lot about a person from where they grew up." It's not meant to be a question, nothing for Dream to respond to or offer his thoughts on, just a matter-of-fact statement. "I want to know more about you."

Dream lifts his brows, a silent way of telling George to ask away. *I want you to know every last thing about me*, he thinks. He doesn't say it.

"Take me to where you lived, Dream. Show me every last place, until I'm sick of seeing the same trees everywhere I turn and wonder how you didn't go insane in eighteen years when I'm losing it after a week."

And so he does.

They're not in any kind of rush, so Dream opts to go in chronological order. It's how all the best stories are told.

He grew up going to church.

"That's just what people do here. It doesn't matter if you're Baptist, or Protestant, or whatever else. That's not really the point of going to church, or was the point, I guess." The parking lot is barren. Moss grows around the edges of the cross mounted above the entrance. "Everyone goes to church on Sunday morning. If you don't, you're an outcast. And, well, you can't really afford to be an outcast in a town where everyone knows everyone."

George hums, contemplating. "Is that something you enjoyed as a kid?"

"Oh, absolutely not," Dream chuckles warmly. "I couldn't sit still for more than like five minutes when I was younger — I probably still can't, actually — so all my memories are of getting in trouble. By the time I was old enough to listen to what they were saying I knew I didn't agree with most of it. I was like ten then, I think? Maybe it was eleven, I'm not really sure."

"I'm sorry about that."

Dream is quick to respond. The words come so easily when he feels at home. "Don't be. It's not like either of us can do anything about it now."

"But still, I feel bad. It doesn't seem easy growing up surrounded by a bunch of people who preach intolerance and pretend it's kindness or whatever it is they like to mask it as."

He's not so fast this time. It's not an easy thing, accepting the hardships of youth for what they are instead of pushing them off to the side and pretending like they didn't have an effect, because they always do.

"I—" Dream starts before pausing to take a breath. *Calm down.* "I'm still not sure how to feel about it all, honestly. I've only been gone for a few months. Is it bad to say I don't think I'll ever fully understand it all? It's just so..."

"Complicated?" Dream nods. George continues. "That's how I feel about a lot of my youth too. I didn't get the same shot at childhood that everyone else did. Mine ended the day I realized why I wanted to be friends with the cute guy in my science class so much."

A memory comes barreling to the forefront of his mind, something Dream nearly forgot about completely. It's mischievous smiles and dirt-covered knees, hands wrapped around a football that's a bit too big, and a friendship that wasn't just that.

"I met the first boy I ever had a crush on here, actually. It happened right over—" Dream points to a basketball hoop across the parking lot. "There. We were in youth group together when I was 13. His name was Luke, I'm pretty sure. Yeah, Luke. I'm sure he had some dumb nickname though, we all did back then. That's how I got Dream."

"Tell me about him. He seems like he was important to you."

"We just *clicked*, I guess. It's a bit fuzzy for me. I tried to forget the details at some point, probably." George frowns at that. Dream chooses not to acknowledge the fact, and continues on.

“We hung out nonstop for weeks after we first met. Our parents practically had to pry us apart. Somewhere along the way he was telling me about a girl at our church who he had a crush on, and I realized that *I* had a crush on *him*. He moved away a few weeks later, I think to Massachusetts. I hope he’s okay.”

At the conclusion of his story, a silence settles between the two. Dream said his piece, all that’s left is for George to react.

“Are you okay?” He breaks the silence.

Dream is slow to respond. “I’m not sure, I guess so. Why?”

“Nevermind. Where are we headed next?”

“A library?”

“What’s wrong with libraries?” Dream asks, turning to face George. “I used to love going here.”

He runs his lip between his teeth before answering. “It’s not that there’s anything wrong with libraries, not at all. It’s just— it’s not what I would’ve expected, that’s all.”

“What would you have expected instead?”

“Honestly, like a football field or something.”

Dream’s laughter fills the air, a golden wave radiating from deep within his core. “Fair enough, I should’ve seen that coming.”

“So, why here?” George’s head comes to rest in his hand. His eyes track Dream’s every movement, and they won’t relent. “Why is this place important enough to show me?”

Every place I’ve ever been is important enough to show you. I want you to see me, to understand me in a way that I can’t understand myself, he thinks. “I love reading, always have.”

Silence seems like it’s becoming a habit of George’s. It’s the way he never even tries to get a word in, just urges Dream to continue telling the story of his life, that seals the coffin.

“This was always a place I could escape to. No matter what I felt, no matter what I knew or didn’t, there’s someone else who’s gone through it too.” The skin sticks up at the corner of his nail. Dream pulls at it until he sees red. “I guess it helped me feel less alone, y’know? There’s thousands of people just like me, even if it didn’t always feel like it.”

“I don’t know anyone like you, Dream.”

The skin bothers him. George takes note like he always does and holds Dream’s fingers still. They can’t hurt him anymore, not when George is there.

“Well, you can’t know everyone.”

His fingers are just the littlest bit colder than Dream’s. Still, warmer than Florida’s sorry excuse for winter weather.

“I think if I lined up every person to have walked this earth, put them in a row, and went one by one until I reached the very end of the line, I wouldn’t find anyone that’s like you.”

Dream drips a slow trail of crimson. George smears it with his thumb, intentional.

“That’s not possible, you know it isn’t George. Billions and billions of people, and not one would make you think of me?” *I see you in everyone, in everything, always.* “You don’t have to try and cheer me up. I’m not sad anymore — not like I used to be — and I don’t want your pity.”

“That’s not what I mean,” George says softly. He’s not hostile like Dream is accustomed to. “Sure, someone might look like you, or do the same things that you do, but nobody is you. Nobody shakes their head before shivering exactly like you do, nobody taps all of their fingers in order to turn the ignition, nobody does those things. They’re *your* things, only yours. That’s what I mean.”

Nobody makes me want to break rules like you do, he thinks. He’s halfway to admittance before common sense takes over and diverts Dream’s one-track-mind.

“You’re unique too, then.” George nods. “There aren’t any two people like us.”

“I haven’t thought of it like that before. The both of us, I mean.” Dream’s palm is sweaty and his finger has long since dried up. Still, George holds on.

Dream is careful when he asks, but he doesn’t need to be. Secrets aren’t shared at noon on the Wednesday before Christmas. “Why is that? Why haven’t you?”

“I’m afraid of what I might think. I don’t know that I understand myself to the same extent as you. I think that—” he hesitates, “—I think I should stop talking before my mouth runs me into trouble.”

I think things I shouldn’t too. We aren’t that different, George.

“It’s alright. I still have more places to show you, if you’d let me.”

“That would be nice, yeah.”

They’re wordless as Dream drives away, bleak building fading into a rural background that’s never felt much like home. The town might try and hide its desolate nature with pretty signs and new storefronts, but the pavement beneath his tires is just as cracked and broken as always. Some things never change.

Like the McDonald’s sign flickering endlessly. Even though it’s the middle of the day and there’s not a cloud in sight. There’s no reason for it to shine, and yet.

“Are we stopping for food?” George asks, eager.

Dream doesn’t want to disappoint him, but he fears he’ll have to at some point. “I mean, you can get something if you want. You know I don’t like this shit.”

“Okay yeah, I should have seen that coming. This is one of the places you wanted to show me, then?” Dream’s head bobs in response. *Yes,* it says, *I want to show you the world, but we can start*

at this McDonald's if that's what you want. George does not respond to the unseen and unspoken. He can't. "What about a restaurant that you *detest* so much could have shaped you as a person?"

He's slow on the rebuttal, but eventually it comes. "It's not all of them, just this location." There's an empty parking space to his right. Dream swings wide, gritting his teeth when he barely makes the turn, and pulls forward until there's nowhere else to go. "This one, right here in front of us."

"Do I even need to ask you to elaborate at this point? You know I want more than just that."

And I want more too; your hands, your lips, your waist, your hair, you. I want more of you, more than you're giving me. I wish I didn't care enough, then maybe I could take what I want. I'll wait for you, if that's what you'll ask of me.

"I was gonna do it anyways. I knew you were going to ask if I didn't, so..."

"Aw, we're finishing each other's sentences!" George's grin spreads the slightest bit too wide to be genuine, his tone just that little bit too forced. "It's almost like we're a real couple."

Dream feels like he's been skewered through the heart, or something else less dramatic but equally as painful. He shouldn't wish it was real, he *can't*, but what are you supposed to do other than surrender when it's a war you don't want to be fighting in the first place? He doesn't want it to be an act that stops the second the camera turns away.

"Almost," he says. Tears threaten to spill, building up behind his eyes and ready to jump at the signal, but Dream wills them away and so they depart him, if only for the time being. "Anyways, back to the McDonald's."

"Right, yes, back to the McDonald's. Namely, why?"

He inhales, slowly. The air fills his lungs, burning the skin as it enters, only to be forced out seconds later. It hurts him, but Dream thinks he might just die if he decides to abstain from breathing. The same can be said about George.

"I've been here more times than I can count, and I don't think I've ever actually ordered anything. This is where I go— *used* to go, I mean, with friends when we wanted to get away. There isn't really much else to do here, if you haven't noticed." George nods. He has, he's seen it in the way Dream acts like a stranger when he's never known anywhere else. "It's never closes either, so it's kind of perfect."

"But what did you *do*?"

"Nothing. I didn't do anything. That's the beauty of it, really. Everything about me changed, but nothing here ever did; new clothes, new friends, new realizations, all of it, and that damn sign would still be flickering when I leave."

"But you like change, I know you do. You moved eleven hours away for school just because you could, you always want something fun and exciting and *new*, but the McDonald's having a shitty sign is where you draw the line?"

I don't like change when it comes to love. I love my friends, I love my memories with them even if I hate where they were made, and I never want the places they happened to move. Lock the car doors and freeze us in time, I'll be content to sit here and stare at you with a smile until I can't anymore. That's what you don't understand about me, but I'm afraid to tell you. I don't want you to change how you are around me. Do you understand it now? I don't want to change the rules, I've already broken the most important one.

These are all the things he does not say.

George's hair curls around his ears. Dream can't bring himself to lie when he's looking in George's eyes, so he settles for the gently rolling sea of umber. "I guess so? I don't know why that's where the line is, but it is."

"You're an interesting person Dream."

"Thank you?"

George doesn't miss a beat when he replies, reassuring Dream's questioning tone with a sure answer. "You're welcome, and I'm hungry."

Dream feigns a gasp, overdramatizing the drop of his jaw and raising of his hand far past the point of realism. "Are you actually asking to eat at *my* sentimental McDonald's? That's fucked up George, that's so fucked up. I can't believe you would do that."

"You could get something too, y'know. It could be *our* sentimental McDonald's."

And, well, Dream hasn't considered that part of it before. He's been rewriting his history all day, paving bad memories over with love-filled glances that last far too long, but never long enough. What's one more thing to embed within his overflowing heart?

"We can share. That seems vaguely symbolic."

"What, like burying your past self and starting again with me?" He shrugs like it's not a big deal. It's the most important kind of change, the most uncomfortable, but somehow it's the most promising. "I like that idea, I like that I'm involved in this somehow."

Softer, Dream's voice echoes. "Of course you're involved. I wouldn't want to do this alone."

He's not talking about ordering some shitty food.

"Well, get your ass up and come inside with me. I'm putting my vote on a McFlurry. Let's go!"

Dream doesn't even like ice cream.

His lips end up tasting like Oreo and vanilla.

"It feels weird being back," Dream says. "The last time I was here was graduation, I'm pretty sure."

"Huh," George sighs. His eyes dance around, trying to take in all their surroundings through the dirty windshield. It's not very difficult; the building was affectionately referred to as 'the brick' by students and teachers alike for its nondescript and monotonous exterior. "Yeah, that would probably feel strange. I couldn't tell you. I won't ever be able to, actually."

“What, not planning on going back home to relive old memories at least once?”

The noise George lets out sounds like a mix between a wheeze and a shout. Dream infers that it's meant to be a laugh because of the giggles that follow. His face blooms bright carmine as he struggles to regain his composure with deep breaths. “Oh, absolutely not. Do you know anything about British schools?”

Dream shakes his head.

“I assumed as much. We don't even have highschool like Americans do.”

His tongue darts out to wet his lips before he speaks, sickly sweet. “I feel like you haven't told me anything about what your life was like before you moved over here.”

“Uh, yeah, I guess so.” George's cheeks are still fading red, but it's bashful instead of joyous this time. He rubs his hand across the back of his own neck and teeth pull at half-attached skin, tearing his lips open in the smallest of ways. “I don't usually like to talk about it. It feels too personal for most people, so I guess I just skip over it.”

“Am I most people,” *please don't let me be*, “or am I the exception, George?”

Dream's finger is bleeding again. George wasn't holding it, wasn't distracting him, so self-injury of the most mild type ensued. It's just the tiniest bit of blood, not even enough to properly feel.

George notices anyways. Wordlessly, he picks up Dream's hand and interlaces their fingers.

Thank you for protecting me from myself. I love when you do that, how you always seem to know when I'm hurting even if I don't know it, Dream thinks. He wants to say it, he's halfway there before a soft voice stops him dead in his tracks.

“No. Of course you aren't, don't you know that?”

The tension is palpable in the air. Dream has to do something, *anything*, before he throws away every last chance he's had at something good. All he has to do is not slip up until they're back at school and he can give this a shot, for real. George's eyes dart down to his lips, a blink-and-you'll-miss-it moment. This can't happen. This won't happen, Dream won't let it, not parked in his shitty old car outside of his highschool.

“You might be overestimating me. I'm not the best at understanding people. Numbers are fine, those are easy because they always make sense, but people I'm not so sure of. Remember how you wound up here in the first place?”

“That's true, you are kind of shit at realizing what people want.” There's a message encoded in the way the words roll off of his accented tongue. Dream won't bother himself with unscrambling it, he can't right now. It's taking all of his energy not to surge across the center console towards George and kiss him breathless. “But that's alright. You'll be okay in the end, I know it.”

“You can't just *know* something like that, idiot.”

Indignantly, George sticks his nose up. “Oh, but I can and I do.”

“How?”

“I know you, Dream. That's why.”

Oh.

He's so fucked. Like, really fucking fucked.

Dream has to change the topic now, he needs to, because his mind is rapidly filling with vanilla-tinged kisses and soft hair running through his hands and—

“Tell me about your life before America, before *me*,” Dream says, and he hopes to whatever higher power there is that he doesn't sound like a man completely and totally in love. “I've been showing you mine. It's your turn now, George.”

“What do you want to know?”

“I'll take whatever you're willing to give me.”

George sighs. He's sitting in the passenger seat like always, knees drawn up to his chest and arms resting atop them. Wistfully, he looks out the window at a whole lot of nothing. Maybe there's something out there Dream isn't seeing, but he can't place it. “I'm the middle child. Two sisters, both of them about two years apart from me. I don't normally tell people that.”

“Why?”

“Because then they'll grimace and ask if it was like everyone says, and I don't have the heart to lie and say it wasn't.” Dream doesn't know what he's supposed to say. George doesn't give him the chance to think about it much longer, luckily. “I wasn't given the most attention as a kid. I get it, I understand why it happened and know it wasn't my fault, but that doesn't really change much of anything.”

He's still holding Dream's hand. Tighter, he squeezes.

“I flew under the radar, was mostly left to my own devices and all that. My sisters had each other, my parents had my sisters, and I was just kinda *there*. I was expected to get good grades and everything, nobody ever celebrated when my marks were near-perfect. I know that's a dumb thing to complain about—”

“—if you want to complain about it, it's not dumb. You're a person with feelings George, you're allowed to feel however it is you do and there's nothing wrong with that.”

“Thank you Dream,” he says before picking back up where he was interrupted. “I was stupid enough to think they wouldn't care about me being gay. I mean, it's not like they ever cared about anything else, so why start now right?”

Dream nods. He can hear George's voice begin to waver, but he chooses to ignore the fact. It's a small kindness. “Apparently, I was wrong. They cared a lot, and now I'm at school across the ocean because of it.”

“Oh, *George*,” Dream says. He knows the feeling all too well, and so he understands that sometimes there's nothing that can be done. People like them weren't known for having the best luck with this sort of thing. “I know I can't stop the hurt, but I want to more than anything.”

“You're so kind to me. You don't have to be.”

It's heartbreaking how George can't see how loved he is. Underneath the joking remarks and sweet smiles, he's just a little bit broken.

“I want to be, though. Let me be kind to you, and maybe it’ll help—even if it’s just a little bit.”

“Tell me about why you took us here,” George responds. “I don’t want to talk about me anymore, not right now.”

“Okay, I will. I promise I will George, if that’s what you want.”

There’s a familiar car parked out front when Dream pulls into the driveway.

“I swear I recognize that car but I have no clue from what,” he says to nobody in particular. George is the only person around to respond, though, and he sits listening when they come to a stop.

“Is it one of your sister’s friend’s parents?” A click resonates through the air as he unbuckles his seatbelt. “Her thing was supposed to be over like thirty minutes ago, but maybe someone was late?”

“Yeah, I guess so. That doesn’t sound quite right, but I don’t know who else it would be.” Dream steps out of the door, swinging around to make sure George was able to get his door open as well. He waits patiently so the two of them can walk inside together.

It’s almost dark out by now. Dream tried to explain the beauty of that day’s sunset to George earlier, but he ended up being met with only stubborn resistance. Swaths of crimson cut across the pale golden sky—almost as if it was pulsating, bleeding red—and to him it was nothing out of the ordinary. It took a good twenty minutes of arguing until George told Dream he couldn’t even see half of the colors. They’re gone from the sky by now, Dream can see it as he makes his way to the front door with George in tow.

Before Dream can pull the door open, it swings out at him. “Excuse me?” he says, and at the same time a voice that’s far too recognizable calls him out by name.

“Dream?”

There, standing in his doorway, is the girl he hasn’t spoken to in nearly six months.

“Natalie?”

She looks the same as the last time he saw her. Hair still long and blonde and envied by everyone, eyes still a welcoming hazel that drew him in the first time around, she’s still the same person he once loved.

“Why are you here? I haven’t seen you in forever,” Dream asks, his hand wordlessly finding George’s and linking them together. He’s glad to know that instead of sad or angry, he’s at peace with how things ended between them. Besides, he has George by his side if things go awry.

She’s halfway to a response when his mother appears from around a corner and interjects. “Oh Dream, you’re home,” she says, and though it’s masked with delight, he can pick up on the way her

voice drops off like it always does when she's disappointed. "Natalie was just picking up her sister and I had to invite her in. You understand, don't you?"

"Of course, of course." The air is cold on his gums when Dream grits his teeth and forces a smile. George's hand squeezes his tighter, and it's then he remembers the entire point of bringing a boy home with him over break. "I'm sure you told her about George?"

"I— I can't say that it came up in conversation, actually," she replies, and Dream knows he's won the smallest of victories.

"Well," Dream starts, turning to face Natalie while allowing George space to make himself seen. "This is George, my *boyfriend*."

And, like he can read Dream's mind, George picks up right where Dream left off. "Natalie, was it? I'm George, it's a pleasure to meet you. How was it you two know each other again?"

The point of it isn't to injure Natalie, not at all. She might be a bit obnoxious, but never mean-spirited. No, it's the way his mom looks like she's dying to say something but won't because *god forbid* she's known as anything other than the most gracious southern woman.

While Dream's lovers — if either one of them could genuinely be called that — exchange polite words, he wraps a hand around George's waist and rests it in plain view of everyone present. A little spite never hurt anyone, surely?

"Well, I'm sure Natalie must have things to do. Why don't you two boys let her outside and come on in, it's too cold to stand around like this anyways," suggests Dream's mom, but he's smart enough to know it's not optional.

They step inside in tandem after letting Natalie squeeze by. She waves sweetly, more to Dream's mom than anyone else, and the door closes behind them.

In the spaces she leaves behind, a tense silence settles. Dream makes no effort to hide his glare, his mother looks like she knows she's done something wrong, and George looks down at his hands, unsure of what he's supposed to do.

He's unreasonably mad. His sister was friends with Natalie's sister, that much isn't a surprise to him. It's not the fact that Natalie came over to pick her up either, no, it's the fact that his mom brought her into their home — already so blatantly disrespectful — when she knew Dream and George were bound to return any minute.

He has to say something, he can't *not* say something when he's been treated like this, and he's halfway to opening his mouth when his mom says, "George honey, why don't you head upstairs? I need Dream to help me with something down here."

Bullshit, that's what it is, but Dream chooses not to die on this hill of all places and nods in agreement, sending George scurrying up the staircase. "What was that about Mom?" Dream asks when he thinks George is out of earshot. There are some things he doesn't need to hear, and this is one of those things.

"Can I not have a conversation with someone?"

He scoffs, one part dismissive and one part wounded. "I'm not stupid, I know *that* wasn't just a conversation. You know it too, so don't act like you don't. It's insulting."

"You have no place to be talking to your mother like that," she says, and — while she may be right

— Dream can't find it in him to care at the current moment. If he's a bit disrespectful in the heat of the moment, so be it. He's angry in the kind of way that makes someone want to lash out and fuck up everything good they've got.

"And you have no place to completely undermine my relationship like that, but here we are."

"But Dream, she's such a good girl, and I'm sure if you would just give her another cha—"

"—Are you serious?" Dream interrupts, voice so close to breaking beyond concealment. "Do you even care that I'm the happiest I've been in years with George?"

The funny thing is, it's not a lie. With George, Dream is joyful and carefree and smiling and *sure*, sometimes his heart aches a bit more than it should, but he's genuinely happy. He doesn't feel the need to hide or suppress some parts of himself like he does with other people, not when George has done nothing but embrace all that he is.

His mother is taken aback by the accusation, no doubt, but she can't find it in her to refute Dream's claim. That's the worst bit of it all, he thinks, the way that she's silent as Dream slinks up the stairs to his room in a place that's never felt less like home.

Chapter End Notes

...hi?

please don't be mad at me it will get better next chapter i promise

also because some people noticed it: yes! the title is from 'tis the damn season by taylor swift, i love taylor very much

speaking of next chapter, expect that sometime next week! i'm right in the middle of exams season so writing has been but on the back burner for a second BUT i've already got a decent amount of it done, so i'm hoping for thursday the 16th and that sounds pretty achievable to me.

what were y'all's thoughts on this chapter? i was super excited to post this and i have some favorite parts, but i wanna hear yours! this fic is my baby and it is a little scary showing it to the world but that's okay because i like sharing things with people

see y'all in a few days !!!!!!! hopefully !!!!!!!!!!!!!!! and also merry christmas if you celebrate

as always: yell at me on [twitter](#)

mistletoe

Chapter Notes

hi hi hi hi !!!!! here is ch 3 !!!!! the fic is *technically complete* now, but as you probably already noticed there are 4 chapters listed because i wrote an epilogue too. be sure to check the updated tags/rating because they DID change ;)

i think that's it ! enjoy, and see u in the end notes !!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream can't be blamed for gravitating towards George in his sleep, really. He's had a hell of a day, nobody would accuse him of anything different, and seeking physical comfort isn't out of the ordinary in situations like his. Still, he can feel his heart momentarily stop beating when George slips out in the morning like he always does.

One day, Dream wants him to stay. One day, he wants to be acknowledged as something more than a drowsy mistake to forget by midday. Just once.

Today is not that day. At least George has an excuse this time, going Christmas shopping with Dream's sister. He knows George is trying to give Dream space, to get out of the house and let him process things on his own, but he doesn't want that.

In actuality, all Dream wants is George. He wants the nights when the heater won't kick in, the mornings where they feel like death but figure it out anyways, the road trip giggles and jokes that only make sense to the two of them. In a way, he has these things, but not like he wishes he did.

He doesn't want to stop himself from pulling George closer as the light filters in through the curtains, doesn't want to worry if he's doing too much or not enough or taking advantage of a shitty situation, and most of all, he doesn't want to feel like he's breaking a rule by loving George.

But he does and he is, so life carries on in the most painful way.

This morning, it manifests in the unavoidable feeling of dread pooling at the bottom of his stomach. He's alone in a house with a mother who won't admit she wants her straight son back and a father who's more than willing to do it for the both of them. Yeah, he's not looking forward to getting out of bed at all. Out of sheer avoidance he wills himself to slip back into peaceful sleep, even if it's only temporary.

It's just that. Temporary. As much as he would love to, Dream knows he can't lie in bed until the sun has set again. He has to eat, he has to help decorate, he has to buy presents, and he has to talk to his parents. He can only hope the night has placated their biting tongues like it has Dream's.

He's halfway through with eating breakfast, nearly a successful mission, before his mother steps into the kitchen. She looks momentarily shocked, as if she didn't expect him to make an appearance at all, but is quickly able to mask it with a visage of pure neutrality.

It shouldn't send jolts of pain shooting through his body — the way she's happy to pretend like nothing's wrong — but it does, and it hurts so much more than anything he's ever felt before. It's not something that he can slap a bandaid on or take a few painkillers and forget about. No, it's something rooted so deep within him that it can't be ignored. He wants nothing more than to ignore it, but he sees it in every single guilt-filled stare.

"Dream, can we talk about last night?"

Dream quirks an eyebrow. "You can talk and I'll listen, but I won't promise anything."

"I shouldn't have acted like I did, I know that. I'm sorry." A chair squeaks harshly against the kitchen tile as she pulls it out from the table and takes a seat across from Dream. He's still chewing, a bowl of off-brand cereal sitting in front of him, so he makes no comment on the fact. "I just want to explain myself, if you'll give me the chance."

Wordlessly, Dream bobs his head, prompting her to continue on. He's deserving of an apology at the least, and though he's happy he's been granted that, it's not enough.

"I just always want the best for you — you know this, I'm your mother for Christ's sake — and I might take it a bit too far sometimes," she says, shaking her head. Dream wants more than anything to interject and ask how exactly his highschool ex girlfriend is what's best for him, but he wills himself into silence if only to see what else his mom has to say for herself. "I just want you to be happy, and I remember how big your smile was when you two were together, and I just thought that—"

Poor impulse control wins out, it seems.

"—but I am happy, George and I have told you that so many times. Have you even listened to us, or are you too busy pretending that I'm still the same kid I was years ago?" Dream's voice cracks as the words spill out like water from behind a dam.

His mother looks dejected, eyes meeting anything but Dream's own. She doesn't want to admit her shortcomings as a parent, but it's hard not to at least acknowledge them when they're sitting in front of her with a wavering voice and hands that can't seem to stop shaking. "But you're still a kid; you're still the boy I took to the park every other night — because every night was too much — and had to drag out of the library at closing time with a book in hand and a smile on his face. Is that not you? Aren't you my baby?"

"Why can't you just admit that I've changed? You haven't seen me in *months*, how can you expect everything to stay the same? I'm nineteen now, a legal adult, and I'm supposed to act like I did when I was a dumb kid?"

"A boy still needs his mother, whether he's nine or ninety. You're not exempt from that just because you don't live here anymore," she says, and she's finally able to maintain some semblance of eye contact with Dream — though, she isn't out of the woods yet.

“And I need you to *support* me. Not just through the nice bits, the ones you can post about on Facebook or brag about to your friends, but all of them. Even the ones you’re uncomfortable with or don’t quite understand, I still deserve that.” *Please don’t stop loving me because of who I love.* “I don’t deserve to have my feelings disrespected like they’ve been. I think you know that well enough.”

She’s slow to respond, cogs visibly spinning in her head, and Dream can’t stop his mind from running where it does. *Are my feelings not real to you because of who they’re for? Do the people I love make you scared, make you uncomfortable, drive you away?* he thinks. *I don’t want that. I want you in my life just as much as I want anything else, but I won’t give this up.*

His worry is needless. “If you’re happy, *truly* happy, then I’ve done my job as a parent. I just worry about you sometimes. You know how mean the world can be.”

I know better than anyone, in part because of you, is what he doesn’t say. Some things can wait, sit and defrost until the painful spikes of ice have long since melted away and a touch isn’t an instant sentence to frostbite. “I am, and I need you to believe that. I can take care of myself.”

“It’s just—”

“—what? What’s wrong now?” Dream snaps. He doesn’t intend for his response to come across so hostile, but he’s sure he can be forgiven given the circumstances. Being on-edge is nothing more than a default state of mind at this point.

“Sometimes, you have the saddest look on your face when you look at that boy. He looks at you like you hung the stars — each and every one — just for him, and your lip quivers and I think you might just burst into tears when you’re not smiling right back at him. I don’t want you to be sad, not when it’s so clear what he thinks about you.”

Well. Nobody knows him better than his mother, as much as he’d like to deny the fact, and she’s proven it again.

“What does he think about me? Do you know?” he asks, voice eager to learn all that he can. *Surely* she’s wrong about George, he’s just dedicated to playing his part. That’s all it is, all it can be.

A soft chuckle works its way free from her pursed lips, eyes shining with tears, as a gentle smile splits her face. “I’ve never seen anything like it, honestly. I can tell from just a few seconds that he loves you, *really loves you*, in a way that’s difficult to put into words.” Dream mirrors the same smile, though his grin is noticeably larger. “It’s like how you look at him, like he’s sent down from heaven just for you. I shouldn’t have tried to deny that.”

“I won’t—” he starts, before backtracking on his words and starting over again. “I’m not ready to completely forgive you — for all of it, not just yesterday — but I do understand it a bit more now. That doesn’t mean it was okay, that I agree with it, but I can see it more clearly.”

“Oh honey, that’s more than I deserve. Thank you, truly. I’m sorry, and I love you.”

“I love you too,” Dream says, pushing himself back from the table and beginning to make his way towards the familiar comfort of his room, though the most reassuring thing remains missing. He’s halfway up the stairs when a shout comes from the room he’s left no more than ten seconds ago.

“Can you put up these garlands and things inside when you get the chance, Dream? People’ll be over here in two days, and we want the house to look nice for Christmas Eve with the family tomorrow.”

He sighs. *Some things never change.*

He puts up the garlands. And hangs the mistletoe. And sets out the decorations. And wraps a few presents. And everything else he's asked, until his mother sighs and calls it perfect, so he grabs his wallet from one table and keys from another and drives like the devil's breathing down his back.

That's not the case, not even close to reality, but it sure as hell feels like it to Dream. Hours of awkward conversation while trapped in the house with horribly obvious tension nearly palpable in the air would drive even the most sound of mind insane. Dream is anything but sane, he's been slipping inch by inch into the pool of madness that is longing for days upon end now.

He's not as reluctant to submerge himself as he thought he would be. Some foolish part of him buried deep beneath peppermint breath and frostbite fingers hopes George would dive in headfirst and keep him afloat.

It's not unfounded in reality, not if what his mother told him is any indication of how George truly feels. Still, he's reluctant to be optimistic. There's nothing more tragic than getting your heart broken on Christmas, and Dream won't let himself be the thing that proves the rule. He can't break the rules, *he can't*, except he might already have, and what's a lovesick man supposed to do other than love?

Well, for one, he can drive himself to the local convenience store and do the Christmas shopping he's put off as long as humanly possible. He can pick out a gift that's ambiguous enough to not be an outright lie either way, which is a bit ironic given the circumstances. He's lying to George about his feelings, and lying to his family about George, and in a way he's telling the truth about George too?

Trying to make sense of the web of lies he's woven himself dead in the center of only makes Dream's headache worse. He really needs to drink more water; all the crying he's been doing dehydrates him.

So when he's checking out, he grabs a bottle of water off of the shelf and sets it with the rest of his things. It's an odd assortment, but the cashier won't say anything. She just scans item after item wordlessly, monotony infesting her movements until each and every possible variation has occurred and there's nothing left to do but start over again.

It's with a courteous nod and a "*thank you ma'am*" that Dream makes his exit, beelining to the front seat. There he can wrap his gifts in relative privacy, far enough away from sparkling eyes that make him want to give up all his secrets with just one glance.

And he's almost done, putting the finishing touches on the horrendously-patterned wrapping paper, when his phone's vibration is amplified by the plastic cupholder it sits upon. A quick glance at the illuminated screen tells him it's a text from George, so Dream picks it up and swipes into his phone.

boyfriend george (REAL!): where r u dream? bailey and i just got home and ur mom said u werent here :(i feel like we havent seen each other in forever and i miss u

He's going to lose his mind, in the most literal sense of the phrase. Here George is, texting dream about how much he misses him when they spent all of yesterday no more than three feet apart, and he's fucking giggling, like a schoolboy with a crush.

dweamie: i was doing some last minute shopping, but that's all done so i think i'll be home soon. do you have anything you need me to pick up while i'm out?

boyfriend george (REAL!): yeah actually can u get me some updog??? i left mine on campus and i rly need it...

Dear god. This shouldn't be endearing. If anything it should be a red flag, but once again Dream can't contain the childish joy he's filled with every time George's name pops up at the top of his screen. He's acting like a damn middle schooler, they both are, and he's too enthralled to give a shit.

dweamie: the place i'm at only has sugma, is that okay? i really wouldn't want you to go without, i know how badly you need it

If seventh grade Dream could see himself now, he'd be equal parts proud and disappointed. It's better not to delve into the specifics — what would make him happy, what would make his face fall — and instead appreciate it for what it is.

boyfriend george (REAL!): i h8 u ur the worst i never want to see you again go away die die die i cant believe u would try to get me to say that wtf

His cheeks ache, smile pulling at the corners, as Dream types out a final message before heading back to where he feels most at home.

dweamie: On my way!

George is out the door, greeting him with a smile, before Dream has even shifted into park. Dream opens his door, only to immediately have his ears assaulted and gift plucked from his hands by a George who's surely had some unspeakable amount of caffeine to be acting like this.

“Ooooooh, is that a present? Who's it for? Will it break if I shake it? Wait, is it mine? Is that why you bought it while I was gone? Dream, you have to tell me what it is, it's basically already Christmas so you're really doing yourself a favor. Can I guess what it is? Is it legoes? Or is it something else... no, surely not, right?”

“Out of pure curiosity, have you had any caffeine today George?” Dream asks, taking the neatly-wrapped gift back from its captor and holding it out of reach.

His eyes widen, and George nods enthusiastically. “Yeah, Bailey and I tried all of the Starbucks Christmas drinks so we knew which ones were the best. Why?”

How he’s made it this long without constant adult supervision, Dream isn’t sure.

“I can tell.” They walk to the door, though George’s motion could be described with much more innovative language. Dream doesn’t understand how it’s physically possible to be *that* hyper, but George has always challenged what Dream thinks he knows in the short time they’ve been friends. “How was today, besides the excessive coffee?”

“Really good, actually. Your sister had so many childhood stories to share with me.”

“Oh, I’m gonna kill her.”

“But you don’t even know what she told me,” George whines, hand coming to rest on Dream’s forearm as he tries to open the door. “Don’t you wanna know?”

He grins, looking up at Dream through thick lashes and a devilish gaze. George’s eyes bore into his skin, setting it alight where the two make contact, and Dream wants nothing more than to dodge the heat before it overwhelms him. But they’re being watched, the worst kind of torture, so he’s frozen in place.

“Uh— I— I’m good, actually, I think. Yeah, it’s fine. Mhm,” Dream says, stuttering hopelessly while George, relentless, doesn’t let his goron’s gaze falter for even a moment.

“Are you sure?” Boiling fingertips skirt across ice-block skin, threatening to carry the melt up from his veins and into his heart unless Dream does something to stop it. He’s not sure that the effort isn’t futile. Dream is stuttering out a flushed response when the door swings open, saving him from a sweltering descent into the depths of hell.

“Am I interrupting something?” Bailey asks, more inquisitive than genuinely concerned about her presence causing discomfort; as if Dream’s wandering heart wasn’t giving him enough already.

George, *the motherfucker*, laughs and reassures her that, “*no, of course you aren’t,*” because if his sultry gaze and marble-chiseled bones weren’t enough, he’s also apparently best friends with Dream’s younger sister now. He is so far beyond fucked it’s not even funny.

“I’m gonna head upstairs and shower, can one of you guys come get me when dinner’s ready?” Dream asks, already halfway up the stairs before George can do something that makes him want to do something dumb like kiss him breathless in the middle of the hallway for no good reason. He can hear bickering fading into the background as he escapes, and it’s so much more painful to know how well George fits in with the people most important to him.

Instead, Dream scrubs his body clean of George’s wandering touch and hopes it’ll make the burning that lingers where he once was subside. It doesn’t, it never does, but Dream has to at least try to grab at the rocks that line the pool’s edge before he resigns himself to a self-inflicted drowning that starts and ends with those damn eyes and how they’re always shining even when it doesn’t make any sense for them to.

He rubs and he rubs and he rubs until the skin’s nearly raw, but it *won’t fucking help*, because Dream’s affliction is rooted far beneath the surface, ingrained into the very cells that keep him alive and breathing and not the ones that flake away beneath a pointed edge.

He almost wants to cry, he knows he could without any effort, but Dream cannot let himself be resigned to mournful longing without at least trying to love and be loved in a way that breaks all

the rules he knows to be true. Losing faith now only dooms him for the inevitabilities of Christmas Day, so Dream will grit his teeth and hide his emotions for just a few days longer until he's not risking everything good he has just for a shot at something with the potential to be better.

Dream doesn't let a single tear slip free beneath the artificial rain.

It's not until he's out of the shower, lying in the bed that he's shared with George for all these endless days, that he allows himself to *breathe*. The cool air rips him open on the way down and scratches at his throat in a way that stops the looming overflow of his mouth, if only for a little while. The placating oxygen fills him like a suffocating man slipping into darkness; it's enough, if only for right now.

His peaceful silence — only disturbed by frantic inhalation — is disrupted by the gentle squeaking of a door softly swinging open. Quiet footsteps pad over to where he's sprawled across the mattress, a tentative hand stroking his hair when Dream fails to acknowledge the visitor.

"Dinner's ready, y'know," George says, almost indiscernibly quiet. It's like he's afraid to change things, fuck with how he's wandered into them, but surely he knows Dream wouldn't be mad at him for it. *Change is good when it's paired with love. Do you know that I love you?*

Dream sighs. As a way of answering, he moves his head to follow George's touch.

"How was today, really?"

"Better than I thought it would be," Dream says slowly. Molasses drips from his every word. "But I'm not sure that I thought *anything*, so..."

"Do you want to talk about it?" George asks, always the kind and caring friend before anything else. *I want you to be something else to me.* "You don't have to, of course, but you can."

He weighs the merits of each scenario in his head before coming to a conclusion. One is much riskier, much more likely to end in disaster that only makes his heart sting more than it already does, and it's so difficult not to pick it for the small chance that it *doesn't*.

"It's alright, I talked about everything with my mom. Nothing you need to worry about." *A blatant lie.* "You said dinner was ready, yeah? Let's eat."

Dream hates himself for thinking anything would change. George reaches for him when the sun has long since sunk below the horizon and shakes off his touch the second it peeks above, which is odd considering he's a self-described "heavy sleeper" and even delayed their road trip by being asleep. It might just be because he doesn't want to hold Dream like he wants to hold him, and if that's the truth it's just something Dream has to live with.

That's not to say it doesn't sting, because it does. His pillow is still warm, but Dream is freezing down to the bone. Frostbite is never something you're warned about growing up in Florida, but here Dream is, terrified that it's going to chip away at his fingers and toes until all that's left is rotting blue.

He's so close to throwing it all away if it means the pain will stop, but there's only two more days until they can leave and stop pretending to be something they aren't, and then maybe Dream can

think about something other than the way George's cheeks flush pink in the cold. *Get through today and tomorrow, and then I'm free*, Dream thinks to himself. *After that, it's all over. We still have Harry Potter World and eleven hours alone in a car, but I don't have to pretend to be happy about what we are when we're away from everyone else.*

Because he *isn't* happy, not at all. He's so fucking devastated every time George takes him by the hand or looks at him fondly because none of it is real, and he can't let himself slip into the bliss of ignorance because he knows the truth.

He knows it when he gets out of bed, when he pulls on a sweater and fixes his hair in front of the mirror, when he walks down the stairs to be met with George's presence, when he smiles and interlaces their fingers before walking into the living room. When he does anything and is reminded of George, he knows the painful truth like he knows how to breathe or move his legs.

It's so unbearable, to the point that Dream has to remove himself and hide away in the bathroom every few hours because he's constantly reminded of the fact that George isn't really his when they're obligated to sit around his family all day and act like the happiest couple to have ever existed.

The worst part is when George notices — because *of course* he does — and asks Dream in the kindest voice if he's alright, and he can't say that he isn't because that would give it all away, but lying to George hurts almost as much as loving him does.

But he's alright with sitting next to George, holding his hand and huddling together by the fire, if it's only for now. Sometimes he can distract himself by staring at sloping cheekbones and freckled skin, and for those few moments when he can't think about anything other than the beautiful boy beside him, he can forget what he can and can't have. It's a wondrous feeling — like a match striking for the very first time and bursting into flames — that blooms in his gut and infects his body when he's lost in George's smile and his lips and his hands and *him*.

It's a sad way to spend Christmas Eve, if he's going to be honest with himself. It's not until long after the sun has set and everyone's retired to their rooms in anticipation for tomorrow, except for them, that Dream lets himself relax.

"I had fun today, really," George says softly, as not to wake everyone else. "I'm glad you let me stay with you. This is a lot better than staying on campus."

Dream exhales. He's leaning into George on one side and the couch cushions on the other, and he's almost too tired to even care about responding. Key word: almost. He'll always respond to George. "Thank you for coming with me. I know it's not over yet — we've still got tomorrow — but I really couldn't have done this alone."

"We're not done after tomorrow, idiot." *What*. "You still have to take me to Harry Potter World. I didn't forget."

"Oh, right, how could I?" Dream laughs. It's endearing how George gets stuck on the details like he does, and he's not sure how to tell him that without confessing everything, so instead he opts for a soft chuckle. "We'll stop on the way back, when we pass through Orlando. That is, unless you object?"

"That sounds perfect, Dream." His eyes flick down to George's lips involuntarily. The corners of his mouth curl into a smile Dream hasn't seen before, one that looks so perfectly content with existence. He can't help but feel a bit jealous that George can just be *okay* with things when all he wants is the one thing he swore he wouldn't have. His gaze travels back up to meet George's, and

he's armed with a knowing look. "What is it? Have something you wanna tell me?"

Yes, more than anything I do. I want to tell you how I've only known you for a week and yet it feels like my whole life, I want to tell you that you've been more helpful than you ever could have known, and most of all I want to tell you that I love you, Dream thinks. It's so difficult for him to purse his lips and shake his head, because he's so close to spilling it all if only for the smallest chance at that feeling of contentness that George radiates here, on the couch at an ungodly time of night pressed far too close to Dream.

"If you're sure," he says, and Dream wants to scream that he isn't, he's anything but that, but instead he just nods and smiles because that's what holds off disaster another day. "I'm going to head to bed, I think. You're welcome to join me."

"Might as well, I'm so tired," Dream whispers, though there's no one around to overhear such a mundane phrase, if someone would even try to. George nods, and slowly he stands up and separates himself from Dream. It's so fucking painful, and it shouldn't be, but it reminds Dream of how every single morning he wakes up cold and alone because George is always the first to leave.

He can't fucking do this. He can't. It's not worth it to throw his heart of glass on the ground every time he's close to George, only to try and patch the thousands of shattered pieces back together into something that resembles what it used to be and do it all again.

George is walking towards the doorway, the place where Dream *knows* he hung mistletoe when he was relegated to decorating with his mother, and Dream is pushing himself out of his seat faster than he's ever moved before.

He's meeting George at the doorway, and a pair of chestnut eyes are widening at the sudden movement.

Dream hesitates, for just a moment, but he's met with a reassuring gaze and that same content smile, and suddenly this doesn't seem all that scary to him at all. A burning hand finds his own, and he's not scrambling to scrub the touch from his body like it never existed, but instead welcoming it.

It's dark outside and nobody else is awake and they're standing underneath a little bundle of red berries and leaves, and Dream squeezes George's hand back.

And then, all at once, Dream surges forward and kisses George.

It's not rushed, not frantic or desperate, but instead familiar in a way that shakes him down to the core and uproots everything Dream once thought he knew about love. It isn't dramatic gestures in front of crowds or devastating speeches that bring him to tears, no, it's nothing of the kind.

It's a beautiful boy on his lips, in his hands, pulling him closer, and he never wants it to stop. Of course, it will; they break apart to gasp for air, cheeks tinted carmine and eyes glazed in pure joy, and it's more a clash of teeth than anything else the next time they kiss because neither of them can stop smiling like a lovestruck fool, and maybe that's what they both are, but if Dream can keep kissing George then he doesn't care.

He's too wrapped up in George's lips on his own, skin beneath his hands, flesh between his teeth, to think, so when the slow separation comes by way of George sliding a hand between their chests and pushing back — so lightly that the touch feels phantom — Dream wonders for a second if he's imagining the growing space where their hearts beat in tandem.

A slick sound is produced when they finally break apart, and Dream has half the decency to be embarrassed by its vulgarity, but it's George and he can't be, not when all he wants is to kiss him again and again until their lips are bruised a crushed merlot and they can't do something as simple as form a sentence, not like George is doing right now.

"This means what I think it means, right?" he asks, and for someone who's been characterized by brazen confidence in the short time Dream has known him, George sounds awfully unsure of himself, like he's petrified he's been led on and made a fool of by his wandering emotions.

The sentiment resonates with Dream too, he understands what it's like to be afraid that your love won't be reciprocated when it's all you have to give, but George is sorely mistaken in his fears. "It can mean whatever you want it to mean, this is whatever you want it to be, George," Dream professes, and all George can do now is smile until he's sick of being happy.

"Well, I want it to be whatever *you* want it to be," George teases. His voice is alight with a childish kind of ignorant joy that Dream hasn't been able to experience wholly since that fateful night so long ago when he realized why he wouldn't ever be like everyone else.

"And I want it to be whatever *you* want it to be," he says in return, and it's a sick sort of sweetness that drips from Dream's teasing words, but he's not too sure he cares when George is staring at him like that with blown-out pupils and pink-bitten lips.

"You're insufferable," he says, accented lilt skipping across the syllables like it just can't stand still when Dream's right there. "You should stop talking."

Dream quirks an eyebrow, closing the distance between George and himself until he's got him backed up against the doorway and staring up at him in a way that Dream thinks he won't ever forget. "You should probably do something about that then, don't you think so Georgie?"

"Probably, yeah," George says, nearly mumbling the words into Dream's lips. He's the one to initiate, hands coming up to wrap around Dream's neck and tug at his hair and pull him closer, as if it's even possible for Dream to press more of himself into George than he already is. It's not, but he'll be damned if he doesn't make the effort on both of their behalfs.

He uses his size to his advantage, pressing a firm hand into the small of George's back and bringing him closer until he's forced to separate their lips with a scowl and turn so Dream is the one pressed against the wall this time, and it's really not comfortable at all but George is *everywhere*, a hand on his hips and knuckles in his hair and teeth on his neck and a shudder through his spine, and he's so close to losing it then and there if not for George's reassuring presence in the form of occasional soft kisses intermixed with the biting meant to bruise down the column of his neck.

It's so easy just to stand there and take it, let George have his way with him until they're both panting and looking at each other with wild eyes, but what's the fun in all push and no pull? So when George attaches his lips to freckles skin and runs his tongue along the surface, Dream's hand wanders down to the curve of his ass and *squeezes*, and George whimpers.

He fucking *whimpers*.

Dream is dead. Done-for. Shot and buried and halfway to whatever the hell exists after this, and it's all because of George and his stupid fucking noises that make Dream think horribly sinful things about all the different ways he could pull noises like that from George's lips.

And, like they share a brain, George detaches his lips from Dream's sweltering skin to meet his

eyes with a pair that's equally as blown out from lust, and it's barely discernible but somehow they both whisper the same thing at the same time, "*upstairs*," a plea for everything they're willing to give each other and then some, because when you give an inch you're bound to have a mile taken, though Dream can't say he protests the idea.

In a way they think is quiet (it isn't), they join hands and stumble up to Dream's room, stopping along the way every so often to press kisses into a grinning mouth that so graciously returns them. Dream opens the door, detaching his lips from George's for just a moment so he can shut it behind him without slamming it (he doesn't), before he recaptures George in his hands and on his lips and everywhere else he can, because even the second spent apart is too long for him to be okay with, really.

Between rushed kisses and desperate hands, George makes a silent demand in the form of tugging at the bottom of Dream's shirt until he moves to lift it himself, pulling off the restrictive cotton in one fell swoop and discarding it in favor of kissing George again, because *how has it already been too long?*

There's a moment when they don't move, a peace shared between the two that Dream takes advantage of by asking George what seems obvious. "Do you want this— me, I mean. Do you want me?"

"*Fuck*," George exhales, heat leaving his body with the breath only to be drawn back in when he inhales Dream, "yes, yes I want this, want you, want all of it. Please."

And that's the end of the world as Dream knows it, really. It started with birth, being graced by the light of day and the affection of everyone who stood there waiting on him, and it ends with George groaning and pushing him back down onto the bed that's really too small for the both of them, but nobody's complaining because it gives George an excuse to crawl into Dream's lap and straddle him and pull of his own shirt, because it's just too hot with it on, allegedly.

So this is how it goes: George kisses Dream, pulls him close, shifts his hips just right, and Dream gasps into his neck and begs for him to *do that again, please, oh my god please do that again*.

While George does *that* again and again and again, Dream is reduced to a desperate and whining mess beneath him, and really who could blame him? Heat pools in his gut, and *he's got to get these damn pants off before he dies of arousal*, and George just giggles because he knows how absurd the effect he has on Dream is, but he throws his own pants to the side just the same and kisses him with a ferocity that's both unexpected and somehow perfectly in-character.

"You're controlling," Dream comments when George pushes his head down to rest against a pillow and resumes the complete and total mauling of his neck that was briefly put on pause.

He takes a second to respond, instead acknowledging Dream's words with a particularly sharp scrape of teeth, though it's not an effective deterrent in the slightest. When he pulls his lips free to respond, they're coated in saliva and dripping so fucking obscenely, and Dream thinks George has never looked this beautiful before. "You're into it, though."

Well, he isn't wrong. Dream loves how George knows what he wants and just *takes* it, pulling choked out moans and strained whimpers free from a throat that's reluctant to give up anything at all, loves how he pushes him down and sideways and to the right and wherever it is he wants Dream, because why wouldn't Dream do anything George told him to?

He would, by the way. He would do anything if George parted his pretty pink lips and just asked so politely, but instead George does first and thinks second, and Dream is so happy to roll with the

punches if they consist of sweaty skin pushing against his own and choked-off groans pressed into his lips, his skin, his everything.

“I guess I am,” Dream says — a delayed response — before reaching a hand down the front of George’s briefs and stroking roughly.

“*Fuck* Dream, you can’t just do that,” George says, voice wavering as his aching cock is slowly pulling him towards speaking nonsense.

“Why can’t I?” A thumb swipes over his head, beads of precum being spread down George’s shaft and easing the gentle rhythm Dream sets in time with his hips snapping up to meet George’s. “You like it well enough, don’t you George?”

A particularly forceful thrust lines up so beautifully with the leisurely way Dream strokes George’s cock, and he’s scrambling for something to muffle the resulting gasp before settling on the pillow that Dream’s head lies on, a lustful gaze following his motions. “Fuck, I might actually come right now if you don’t stop looking at me like that.”

“Like what?” Dream asks, even though he knows exactly what George means when he says it. *Like he loves him.*

George scoffs, he can’t be bothered with something so insignificant apparently. “You just did it again, you motherfucker.” His free hand finds George’s — the one that isn’t perpetually pulling at his hair — and interlaces the fingers with his own.

“Aww, how romantic,” George says, right at the same time as Dream rolls his hips in a way that puts pressure on his cock in *just* the right way and gasps out an “I’m close, fuck.”

And George thinks he’s so fucking funny when he giggles, Dream is sure of it, but he shuts up quickly enough when their connected hands are brought down to free Dream’s cock and stroke it alongside George’s.

“Okay, fuck, me too. Why does this feel so fucking *good*, shit,” George mutters, and Dream can’t help but grin at the cursing mess he’s reduced George to with heavy lips and even heavier hands. “I don’t wanna come yet, wanna do so much more.”

Sure, George might make a point, but Dream wants nothing more than to hear George’s pretty little noises when he comes and stroke him through it until he’s collapsed on Dream’s chest, and he’s alright if they can’t get to everything they might want tonight if they can have this as long as they let it flourish.

“I wanna make you come, please, you feel so good in my hand baby. We can do whatever you want tomorrow, just please finish for me,” Dream sighs, and George practically groans at the praise before he can scrape together enough coherent thought to respond.

“Mhm, okay, fuck— make me come Dream.”

And so Dream does. In one hand, George, and in the other the both of them. It takes an embarrassingly short amount of strokes before George is whispering obscenities into Dream’s ear like it’s a secret how fucking good this is, and Dream himself isn’t far behind at all.

“Together?” George asks hesitantly, and before either can offer up any sort of answer, George is spilling into Dream’s hand with a whimper, and the noises alone would be enough to make Dream finish if he wasn’t already. And if the euphoria couldn’t get any better, George connects their lips in a crushing kiss, and it doesn’t even come close to comparing with anything else he’s ever done.

Dream strokes the both of them through their orgasms until it's nothing but uncomfortable overstimulation perpetuating their pleasure, and while he's sure he could go again the second George asked, Dream won't lie and say he isn't compelled to fall asleep right now, so he tucks himself back in to his boxers.

George, evidently enough, is content to do the same. "We're fucking disgusting," he says, but he doesn't make any move to get up and clean himself off either.

"I'm so tired, I think I'm about to fall asleep," Dream says, sentence punctuated with a yawn that proves his point even further.

"You're going to regret not cleaning up in the morning when we're all sticky and sweaty, you know."

"I don't even think I care, honestly," Dream says, and he really does mean it.

George sighs, chest moving against Dream's as he exhales slowly, taking in the breath he spits out. "Whatever, I'm going to sleep. We're gross."

"Yeah, we are," Dream sighs dreamily. "And George, before you fall asleep?"

His head perks up, hazy eyes meeting Dream's that currently reside in a similar state of being.

"I love you."

And sure, George might not answer him with words, but the furious blush spreading across his cheeks and the giggle he fails to hide in the crook of Dream's neck say everything that matters.

"Goodnight, idiot."

Chapter End Notes

uh... hey guys

i actually had the most fun ever writing this chapter which is kind of funny because i stopped writing smut for a few months there because i was tired of it and yet here we are. anyways this is not totally the end, even though the big issue/plot point/whatever the fuck u wanna call def getting their shit together has been resolved, because there is an epilogue coming soon !!

here is now a list of things about the epilogue/chapter 4 that i am coming up with on the spot:

- should be posted around saturday, maybe friday if i write it quickly (EDIT: IT IS 2am ON SATURDAY AND I HAVE NOT WRITTEN ANY EPILOGUE. OOPS. I LIED. BUT SOON I PROMISE)
- takes place on christmas day! aka like 12 hours after what you just read
- it probably won't be as long as the other chapters (my guess is ~4k don't hold me to it tho)

and that is all i can think of right now at this moment in time (9:22 pm on a tuesday as i type this end note)

i was also considering the idea of writing oneshots that take place inside this universe.

some of my ideas were the trip to harry potter world, moving in together whenever that happens, and just kind of them doing shit at college with friends or just themselves, kind of whatever people wanted basically. anyways is that something y'all would wanna read? if it is pls let me know and also comment things you would want to see in said oneshots. i am probably going to copy and paste this entire paragraph into ch 4's end notes too, so if you can't think of anything right now don't worry im going to beg for ideas again in a few days (or minutes if you've been waiting for me to finish this fic)

ok thats all the "business" things i had to say now onto my personal life: exams r going good for all the people who were wishing me luck :D by the time this is posted ill be over halfway done with those which is fun, this is probably my last fic of the year solely because i really want to sleep for a week straight when this is done, and i thinks thats all the things i had to say

ok bye this was a really fuckin long end note LOL if you're still here you must not be annoyed yet which means this is where i will beg for kudos and comments and user subs and all of that good shit. pls love me.

bye bye see u guys in a few for the epilogue <3

epilogue

Chapter Notes

epilogue woo !!!!!!! here's 2k of pure fluff because i feel bad for the amount of time it took for dnf to get together <3 i'll save all the sentimental shit for the end notes so have fun reading and enjoy !!!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“And this is my boyfriend, George.”

It feels like he’s said it a thousand times today alone, but Dream wants to say it a thousand times more. If it were any other day he would grimace internally knowing that it’s nothing but a lie meant to save face at home for the holidays, but it’s not any other day, it’s nothing like it, because today is Christmas and also his one day anniversary with George.

He was met with nothing but an amused snort and upturned nose when he tried to tell George that earlier; eventually he gave in to Dream’s pleading eyes with a begrudging kiss and exasperated smile, though, so it’s a win in Dream’s book.

George smiles politely and shakes the offered hand of whichever one of Dream’s endless stream of relatives they were speaking to this time (his mom relegated them to door duty — something about not trusting either of them in the kitchen after last time).

Once the entryway is cleared of old people carrying pans carried in some kind of foil for what seems like the first time in hours, Dream can feel a vicious grin break out across his lips that he’s been struggling to keep down all this time.

“What are you smiling about?” George teases, as if he doesn’t already know.

Coyly, Dream responds, “oh, you wouldn’t know him. He’s horribly rude, an even worse chef, and he’s so short that I have to squat to talk to him.”

George steps forward with a playful glare set deep in cacao eyes, but the hand resting softly on Dream’s chest gives away how he really feels in an instant, if one would just take a moment to look. “He sounds hot. I bet he’s hot, isn’t he Dream?”

“I don’t know why you would say that,” he scoffs, a hand of his own beginning to trace George’s jawline with a feather-light touch. “But I can’t find it in me to disagree.”

As if he wasn’t the one to propose it himself, George blushes a soft shade of rose at Dream’s agreement with the fact that *yes*, the boy making him smile like an idiot is hot. “You still haven’t told me *why* you’re smiling like that, you know.”

“Well, I guess I just really love him, abysmal cooking skills and all.”

“You’re such an idiot,” George sighs, briefly connecting their lips in a relaxed kiss. “He loves you too, though.”

Nobody’s around, and Dream has half the mind to slip his tongue down George’s throat like the

desperate teenager he is, but he's capable of exerting minimal amounts of self control in situations where it's direly necessary, so he refrains. *For now.*

The slow ending of their kiss is made much more abrupt by the sound of someone impatiently clearing their throat across the room.

"Are you two done being gross yet?" George giggles, buries his face in the column of Dream's neck to hide his inevitable blush, and Bailey rolls her eyes after Dream flips her off with his hand that rests on the small of George's back. "Dinner's ready, according to Mom."

Dream sighs, pulling away from George to face his sister. "Alright, we'll be at the table in a second."

She shrugs, an unsaid "*good enough for me*" obvious in the air. "Oh, and before I go," Bailey says, already halfway out the door, "you should probably try to cover up your neck. It's really obvious."

George smiles against his skin — and Dream is so sure he can feel the heat rising to his face — but he doesn't take the bait, no matter how lucrative. Instead George presses a series of soft kisses against the mulberry-stained skin, right on top of the bruises that he's solely responsible for.

It hurts, in a sweet way, and yet Dream makes no move to stop him and his wandering lips, only squeezes his hand as a reminder that they don't have the time to get lost in each other right now. With a soft huff against his neck that causes Dream to shiver, George detaches his lips and steps back.

"You're so needy, George."

"Yeah," he contemplates, "I guess I am. But you like it though."

Dream smiles, eyes crinkling at the corners, and he's not sure he's ever felt happier than he does right now. "I do. Now let's go, all the food will be gone by the time we're ready to eat if we just stand around."

And yet, neither make any effort to go anywhere at all.

Most everyone has left by the time Dream steals George away with a small bag in hand.

"What are we doing?" George asks, following Dream up the stairs and into his room.

It's not until they're both inside with the door quietly shut in their wake that Dream drops the hand he was using to lead George and holds up the other. "I got you a present."

Umber eyes widen with curiosity and intrigue, a gentle glimmer sitting just behind the surface. "You did?" George dashes over towards his bag, rummaging through messily-strewn piles of clothes before producing a wrapped box of his own. "I got you something too."

And so they sit on the floor, facing each other but still leaving space between themselves, and exchange gifts.

“Open yours first,” Dream says, gaze fixed on the way George’s hands impatiently fiddle with the red and green paper sticking out from the top of the bag. “It’s nothing big, but I thought of you when I saw it, so I just had to get it.”

Gently, George smiles. “I’m sure it’ll be wonderful, Dream. You didn’t need to get me anything at all.”

“Just open it before I make myself more anxious than I already am.” George rolls his eyes, though there’s not even a hint of resentment behind them, and makes quick work of the meager wrapping. Out from his hands and onto the floor clatters a thin red card adorned with a pair of golden arches.

“Did you get me a McDonald’s gift card?”

“I— okay, listen,” Dream stutters, face surely burning a furious shade of crimson. “I can explain.”

George, *the motherfucker*, giggles. “I think it’s sweet. You’re sweet.”

This time, Dream blushes for an entirely different reason. It had everything to do with the way George’s smile widens and fingers drum across the smooth plastic and eyes flicker between Dream’s face and his lips and the box in his hand. Slowly, sweetly, and without any undertone of urgency, George presses his lips against Dream’s briefly before pulling back.

Dream chases his lips like water in the desert, but a gentle finger resting atop his mouth and a stern look from George stop the effort before it’s ever really started.

“Open mine now.”

The box isn’t much, light and about the size of his palm. Still, George stares intently at it in Dream’s hand, so he makes short work of the patterned paper adorning the outside to reveal a plain white box.

“A box? You shouldn’t have, this is too much. I can’t possibly accept this,” Dream teases.

George scoffs. “You’re an idiot. I actually hate you.”

“Oh, do you?” Dream taunts, raising an eyebrow. George almost snaps back, but Dream is quicker. “That’s not what you were saying last night. ‘*You feel so good, fuck, m’gonna c—*’”

“—just open the damn box.”

A subtle grin of victory graces his face and he wants nothing more than to gloat, but Dream is smart enough not to push the limits of George’s kindness. Instead, he flips the box around and pries it open as George watches on diligently. Inside sits a simple brass key, nearly identical to the one Dream was issued at the beginning of the school year with a stern warning not to lose.

It’s a key to George’s dorm.

“You don’t have to keep it if you don’t want it, and it doesn’t have to mean anything if you don’t want it to, but I thought that maybe you would want to be able to see me sometimes when we’re back on campus?” Dream is dead silent, and George does his best to fill it for the both of them. “I know this is probably too much too soon, so you shouldn’t feel bad if it’s a no, but I just wanted to ask.”

“George, I’ve known you for barely more than a week and last night I told you I love you. You met my parents two days after meeting me, and we went on a twelve hour road trip less than twenty-four hours after first speaking. When have we ever cared about moving too fast?”

“I just wasn’t sure, and—”

Dream shuts George up the only way he knows how, with a hand on his jaw and lips pressing against his gently.

Or — at least — that’s how it starts. Very quickly the kiss devolves into something much more impassioned, needy hands tugging George onto Dream’s lap and desperate lips leaving no room to breathe between the both of them.

Dream won’t be the one to end it, parting his lips when George’s tongue prods impatiently and tightening the iron grip he already had on George’s waist. He’s more than happy to let George kiss him senseless if it means he can run his hands along the gentle curve of his abdomen and feel how viscerally he reacts to even the smallest of touches. George’s hands find themselves tangled in Dream’s hair and wrapped around his neck, and the gentle tugging sets his scalp alight in the very best of ways.

George is something sweet — a barely-there taste of peppermint and milky chocolate — and Dream thinks that he might very well acquire a sweet tooth of his own if he keeps kissing George like he does, and yet he makes no effort to stop despite the fact that he’s never been a fan of sugar before now. Dream welcomes the syrupy taste onto his tongue with no regrets even though he feels like it might drown him because of the way it coats everything it touches. If this is how he dies, he’ll die happy.

Every single nerve in his expansive body screams at him to pull George closer, grab him tighter, kiss him harder, but Dream goes against all of them when he breaks his lips away from George’s and creates distance between them. In the most guilt-inducing of ways, George sticks out his bottom lip and gives Dream those pleading eyes that he’s absolutely hopeless against.

“Why’d you stop?”

And it takes a second for him to catch his breath, chest heaving and throat straining, but Dream can’t *not* give George a reason when he’s staring at him like that. “Of course I want your key, you fucking idiot. I love you.”

George smiles beautifully, and Dream can’t find it in himself to do anything but kiss him as hard as he can before rising to his feet and offering a hand to help George to his. “And before you ask, because I know you will, I stopped kissing you because not everyone has gone home yet and I have to say goodbye before they do, and if I didn’t stop then we both know I never would have.”

“I don’t want to stop kissing you.” Indignantly, George huffs, but he doesn’t protest more than that. “I don’t ever want to stop.”

“Trust me, I don’t either, but we have forever to kiss each other.”

George concedes a nod, because Dream really does make a good point. They have all the time in the world to get lost in each other’s lips, lose themselves to everything they’ve been holding back all this time, and even if it doesn’t seem like it, they’ll be alright if they have to remain somewhat decent for an hour or two more because there’s hundreds and thousands of hours yet to come.

“Alright, but you can’t blame me when I try to steal you away and kiss you senseless,” George

yields, and Dream nods in reassurance because he knows he would do the exact same thing.

“Anything else that’s just too urgent to wait before we rejoin society, or am I safe to open this door and walk down the stairs?” Dream asks. He’s joking when he says it, clearly enough, but George still raises his hand in objection.

“Just this,” he says, and presses a bruising kiss against Dream’s lips. “I love you”

Smiling like a kid in the middle of a candy store, Dream opens the door to the world and exits, hand in hand with George.

Chapter End Notes

the end :((((((((i am genuinely so happy with this fic and proud of all the effort i put into it (and it's the first multichap i've finished) so saying goodbye is really bittersweet because on the one hand i am sad that i'm done writing it but i'm happy that there's a complete work of mine out there in the universe.

thank u all for sticking with me thru this wild ride, whether you've been here since day 1 waiting on updates or you're the kind of person who waits for a fic to be complete before starting it. i am a mix of both so this means i love u both equally and it makes me happy that u decided to read this fic <3 if you liked it pls feel free to let me know. whether it's screaming at me on twitter or a simple little click of the kudos button, everyone's reactions mean so very much to me.

but i have good news too: this probably isn't the last of the yftw-verse or whatever you wanna call it! last chapter i asked what people thought of me writing a oneshot or two set after the events of this fic, and i got some very nice responses that made me smile, so those might happen!!!!!! here is where i ask you to comment any and all ideas you have for said oneshots because my creative juices are absolutely shot after writing this tbhchamp.

and now it is time for some very important thank-you's, because this fic would not exist without some special people i love very much:

- thank you [honk](#) for being such a good friend and allowing me to write this for you. i hope it was everything you wanted. merry christmas from your secret santa (ME!!!!!!)
<3

- thank you [mars](#) for letting me brainrot and yell about this fic long before i ever even opened up google docs. it does not go unappreciated i love u

- thank you beetle for proofreading this mess for me i really do not know what i would do without you catching all my dumb errors and also being my emotional support and feedback, because GOD knows i need the guidance. i genuinely don't know where this

fic would be without u

and of course thank you to YOU! it's dumb and sentimental but i don't care i would not be where i am today without people who read the silly things i write so thank u <3

bye bye for now :(

- lex flickerfonds <3

End Notes

yell at me on [twitter](#)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!